OCTOBER 25¢

Fantastic ADVENTURES

DRAMATIC LAST STAND OF THE ATOM SCIENTISTS!

THIS WAY TO HEAVEN by HAROLD M. SHERMAN

fantastic ADVENTURES

OCTOBER 1948

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All Features Complete



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VOLUME 10 NUMBER 10

All Stories Complete

Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating

a scene from "This Way To Heaven."

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THE big news this month is that the typesetters' strike is over and FA can get back to its normal format. You'll be seeing the reader's page again, and all the little touches that you used to like so well. . . . At the same time we should give a nice hand to the boys at the printing plant who cooperated in getting FA out on time each month. Even at the height of the strike we didn't miss a deadline—so thanks a lot boys . . .

BY NOW you know what the cover story is for this month. Yep, a new Harold Sherman novel. This is big news any time, but this time in particular it really *is* big news. With atomic power almost here, and the atom homb already a reality, the world around us is hanging on a precipice of doubt and fear. You can read it in your newspapers every day. The big question is—what will happen if the world plunges into an atomic war? This question is right up Harold Sherman's alley, and he used it as the theme for his new novel, "This Way To Heaven." The story starts off in Heaven, at a meeting of the Catastrophe Council. The Council members are gravely alarmed at the prospect of an atom war breaking out on Earth—and with good reason, for it will mean that the pearly gates will be flooded with millions of souls clamoring for entrance. It is decided in Heaven that something has to be done about it. Man, in his foolish, fumbling way, cannot be allowed to virtually exterminate himself. So—but that's where we stop and you pick up. We think this is one of Sherman's greatest stories, not only in an entertaining way, but also as a thought-provoking treatment of current events. We'll bet you'll do a lot of thinking after you read this story. . . . Let us know how you liked it.

BOB JONES also returns this month, with what we think is a terrific cover. Bob read "This Way to Heaven" and sat down with a vivid idea in mind of what the story portrayed. The result is on the cover for this month. Good, huh?

ARTHUR T. HARRIS presents a neat little short this issue, entitled, "Ernest's Evil Entity." This is the story of a hen-pecked, browbeaten little man, who is afraid of his own shadow—until one day something inside him asserts itself. Just what this something is, and what hilarious adventures Ernest has as a result, you'll find out when you read the story. We got a big kick out of it and we think that you will too.

REMEMBER Bernie Kamins? He's the lad who turned in that neat story, "Astral Rhythm" some months back. Well, it took Bernie quite a while to come through with a new yarn, but when he did it was a ringer. His new story, "The Well-Wisher," is about a man who stumbled into a well and broke his glasses. Nothing unusual about that, you say? Well we can assure you there is—for this was not an ordinary well, not in any sense of the word. It did strange things—especially to the eyes. What sort of things? O.K., now that we've whetted your curiosity you'll want to get at the story. We're sure you'll welcome Bernie back with us.

BOB WILLIAMS returns to wind up this issue with a typical Williams story—which is to say, a terrific little yarn! "The Pruning Man" has a unique idea behind it. Bob visualizes a universe of many dimensions and degrees of life existing in them. In one of these "worlds" there is a special persou who has the unique job of eliminating evil. His particular sector is our own planet, and he finds that he has a real job on his hands. We won't say anything more about the story here—we've already told you too much—but you'll get a big thrill out of the story, and maybe it will set you to thinking that *maybe* the idea isn't so far-fetched.

PREVIEW time this month announces a great new Livingston novel coming up next issue. "Dimensions Unlimited" is the title, and from those two words you can see that you're in for some rapid-fire science-fantasy adventure in other worlds—just the kind of story that Berk has hecome so popular in writing. Remember his "Queen of the Panther World?" Well that will give you a rough idea of the thrills waiting for you in this new novel. Then of course we'll have a lineup of top favorites like Charles Myers (yes, "Toffee" is returning!) and Chet Geier, McGivern, Williams, and many others. The boys have some top-notch stories on deck and we're keeping them busy writing more! We'll be seeing you then. . . . . *WLH*

Squeeze The Juice!

★ By Charles Recour ★

WHEN you squeeze an orange you expect to get orange juice. When you squeeze a lemon you expect to get lemon juice. But what do you squeeze to get electricity? The answer is simple—a crystal!

Back in 1880, Pierre Curie and his brother were experimenting in their laboratory in France on crystals. They were studying crystals of every variety from quartz to aluminum sulfate. This of course was before Pierre married Marie Sklodowska (later the famous discoverer of radium).

One of the unusual properties of quartz crystals that immediately struck Pierre's eye was that when the crystal was struck a sharp blow or exposed to pressure, a momentary electric current appeared, minute but never-the-less, an electric current manifesting itself as a voltage between two metal plates on the opposite sides of the crystal. This was in its way a fundamental scientific discovery. It created no flurry in the scientific world at the time, for there was discovered no possible use for it.

But with the advent of modern radio, the picture changed. As studies of the subject were made, more things began to be known.

If a quartz crystal is placed between two metal plates and a pressure is exerted on it, or if it is given a sharp blow, a voltage appears momentarily between those plates. Conversely, when a voltage is applied to the plates, the crystal changes its size slightly.

If a voltage of suitable frequency, an alternating voltage, is applied to the plates, the crystal vibrates. If the voltage is chosen so that its frequency is correct, the crystal will continue to vibrate—it will be in "resonance" with the applied voltage. This phenomenon has a tremendous application today. Every radio transmitter and station practically uses a crystal as its standard of frequency, because the crystal possesses the unique property of vibrating only with one frequency dependent upon the way it is cut. And it clings to this frequency unstintingly.

A crystal is such an accurate frequency control that when its temperature is held constant and it is shielded from outside influences like stray electric and magnetic fields, it will hold to that frequency almost absolutely. In the case of a radio station the accuracy of its frequency due to the control of the crystal is in the neighborhood of several parts per million! This is extremely important so that radio stations adhere to their given frequencies and do not interfere with each other.

The Bureau of Standards in Washington, D. C., broadcasts standard frequency signals so that anyone, private individual or laboratory, can check their frequency by comparing it with the radio wave broadcast by the Government station.

The fact that a crystal generates a voltage when under pressure is made use of by practically every home phonograph. The crystal cartridge is connected mechanically to the needle and as the pressure applied to it varies with the record, it is transmitted to the crystal which produces a voltage whose wave-form is the exact duplicate of that impressed on the phonograph record. This voltage is then amplified and fed to the loudspeaker.

Thus, it can be seen that Pierre Curie's discovery was of great importance. Unfortunately the man's talents are usually buried under the fame of his wife whom he assisted with such diligence in her work on radium. Madame Curie herself pointed out that the credit was really as much his as hers.

While quartz crystals—the most of them from Brazil—are still used to a great extent in most radio work, more and more scientists are turning to artificial crystals "grown" in the laboratory. Any crystals offer this "piezoelectric" effect as it is known and this is particularly true of crystals of Rochelle salts. These crystals even provide a better effect than quartz. Previously they were less used because they were too small in the natural state. But scientists learned how to grow them in laboratory vats successfully and these artificial growths are being used extensively. Cooled supersaturated solutions of the salt are used for the bath. A rod is placed in the vat and gradually a huge crystal forms around the rod. It is then removed, dried, cut into suitable shapes, mounted and sealed against moisture—often in a vacuum—and is then ready for use.

The grown crystal is no way different from smaller, more familiar ones. It is just that in Nature, chance never permits the crystal to grow to any size without introducing a flaw of one sort or another.

Undoubtedly as time goes on other uses will be found for these piezoelectric crystals. Already they are being made into strain gauges which when applied to a beam or other object under stress indicate, by the voltage they produce, the amount of that stress. This is of importance to aeronautical engineers, bridge designers, building constructors and the like.



THERE WAS consternation in Heaven!

Pandemonium! .... Panic! .... Confusion! .... Excitement! .... Apprehension!

Word had just been received from Earth that *a hundred million human souls* were due to arrive *any minute!*

The news had been flashed to Heaven over the Guardian Angel Communications System. A special session of the Catastrophe Council was called at once to perfect emergency plans as announcement was made to all inhabitants via

THIS WAY TO HEAVEN

By Harold M. Sherman

The Catastrophe Council in Heaven was worried. Atomic warfare on Earth was threatening and millions would flood the pearly gates. Something *had* to be done . . .



As Tom Finley stared in awe at the towering structure before him, a voice explained: "This is the Receiving Station from Earth where all new souls are processed"

Mental Radio.

"Attention, All Residents of First Paradise! An unparalleled event is about to occur on Earth. Atomic war is expected to break out at any moment. The cities and environs of New York, Chicago, Washington, Philadelphia, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Leningrad and Moscow are marked for instant destruction. This means the death and transition of at least a hundred million human souls in literally seconds of Earth time.

"It also means that the capacity of Heaven will be taxed to the utmost.

"No such number of souls has ever come to Heaven at one time before. The nearest approach to this in modern times was eight hundred and thirty thousand who lost their lives in the great earthquake at Shensi, China, January 24, 1556. It took three months of Earth time to pass all these souls through our Receiving Hall and get them properly allocated. But this is less than one one-hundredth of the number expected now. Stand by for further information and instructions!"

Eleven members comprised the Catastrophe Council which was presided over by the Grand Ruler of First Paradise, designated as "The Great One." He was the only member not of earthly origin.

"The Great One" was the Spirit of Good in all humans since the beginning of Time and had taken form and gained in stature as the good deeds and thoughts of all humans in all ages had poured into this Image of their Higher Selves.

There were other Greater Ones in the Paradises beyond First Paradise—made so by the further advancement of Human Souls which, in turn, refined this Image of Their Higher Selves, and gave birth to Beings of more advanced Spiritual Quality and Wisdom.

No soul, arrived in Heaven, long held to his Earth concept of God, realizing now that the Father of All was evolving on the human plane with His Creation, and that it would require untold aeons of Time before the souls of men would reach a development enabling them to see the real Image of God.

When that great moment would ultimately come, each soul now knew it would have advanced beyond the reaches of Time and Space into the Boundless Dimensions of Eternity!

Until then, they could look for guidance to each Great One in the Paradise Progression, and their own accumulated Experience and Wisdom!

The Council Halls of Heaven were throbbing with excitement and speculation.

FIRST PARADISE was not an unlimited domain. It had been created to house the evolving human creatures from Planet Earth and to receive and care for a sizable number of arrivals at any one time during the ordinary course of deaths and births to be expected on this spinning globe. Two world wars in recent years had kept the Receiving Staff busy as well as the Building Commission, but accommodations had been found for all arrivals. It had been, however, a tight squeeze.

And now—*the threatened avalanche of souls!*

"What can we do?" was the question which echoed from the hall and out through the corridors.

"How about doubling up?" suggested Pierre Loubet, a Frenchman, who had been named to the council shortly after his arrival in 1916, from the battle of Verdun. "We've done it before. After the first atomic bomb burst on Hiroshima—those hundred thousand Japanese. I took care of two bewildered youngsters myself till they could make room for them in the Nursery. We

might . . . !"

"Not a chance!" refused Wang Yui, former resident of China. "I know something about big populations. I have seen thousands of my people jammed into small spaces but you have no idea, Pierre, how big a hundred million souls are!"

"Wang is right," endorsed Savel Bose, who had departed India during one of the many religious massacres between Moslems and Hindus. "I come from a country of too many people. They can get along apart but not together. Distribute a hundred million souls among us here and there will be discord in Paradise!"

The Great One nodded and smiled, knowingly. There was a radiance emanating from his form as it reposed in the Great Seat at the end of the Council Table. He was dressed simply in white, robe-like garments. His features were a composite of all earth races, as though an artist might have drawn them to scale.

"Savel Bose has spoken wisely," said the Great One. "There would be turmoil in Heaven if we sought to solve our housing shortage in this manner. We must find some other way of dealing with this colossal influx."

"It would take five earth years to build homes for a hundred million souls, working full time," calculated Henry Bracken, who had been a construction engineer in Brooklyn before his demise in an auto accident on the Fourth of July, 1930. "Even though our methods are vastly improved over any on Earth, and we have no Labor troubles, the mere thought of this mob arriving is appalling!"

"It is," said the Great One. "Heaven's been comparatively quiet up to this time. We've had our moments of course, during wars and big earthquakes. The time the continent of Atlantis sunk into the sea was pretty hectic. There is no one in First Paradise now who was here then. They've long since gone on to higher realms. But I carry all events in my memory, from the start of human life on your planet, and the days that the Atlanteans came over and the globe of the world was awash with water, stand out to me as unequalled—except for those we are about to face."

"Well," considered Herbert Stanley Lawrence, formerly Right Honorable Chancellor of the Exchequer for Great Britain, who owed an airplane crash to his presence in Heaven. "Paradise apparently weathered the Atlantean invasion all right. Perhaps, as England has always done, we can 'muddle through' this coming earth calamity!"

The Great One shook his head.

"If this pending crisis is not met and solved so that this mighty host can be properly handled, there will be violent repercussions in Heaven for many earth years to come!"

A light shone in the face of Council Member Erwin Harbiger, which looked like the reflection of a bright idea. He had been a German scientist, working on V-1 and V-2 rockets until one of them backfired and shot him into the next existence.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "Why not speed up the departure of a hundred million of us to Second Paradise to make room for the hundred million that are coming?"

"Yes, why not?" cried Henry Bracken. "The whole problem is one of turn-over. We're not shipping souls on as fast as they're coming in. If you could get permission to . . . . !"

The Great One raised a restraining hand.

"Soul development, you well know, cannot be hastened. Only those go on to Second Paradise who have earned the right. I have no power to quicken the

time of their going. Some develop faster than others. You have observed that other souls, arriving here from Earth, are so highly developed that, after getting clearance, they pass on through to Second and even Third Paradise. Individual spiritual development controls this entirely. No, our problem cannot be solved in this manner."

COUNCIL MEMBERS lapsed into silence. They were humans, after all, possessing not too much more intelligence than they had while on Earth. But their special talents and Earth experience had qualified them for participation on this Catastrophe Council, under guidance of The Great One. He headed all important councils, committees and groups.

First Paradise possessed a more refined, higher vibrating substance than the plane of Earth. It existed in the form of a concentric ring, high in the atmosphere, around the planet. Second Paradise existed in a second ring outside the first, and successive realms of Paradise up to and including Seven, encircled the first two rings.

After a human soul had evolved through Seven Paradises about planet Earth, this soul was prepared for a long journey through space to a Local Universe Heaven, exact location and condition unknown. It was as great an adventure as dying, for the first time on Earth, in order to change body form and thus be enabled to survive in the First Heaven World.

"One life at a time," had been the rule in the Paradise existence.

As for Hell, this state of being existed on the under side of the First Heaven.

"Well, gentlemen," spoke the Great One, finally, "time is swiftly passing on Earth. Each second brings the inrush of millions of souls that much nearer. You are the ones who must face this experience. I can foresee the great confusion at Receiving Hall with the multitude clamoring for admission."

"This Hall should be vastly enlarged," proposed Henry Bracken. "We should have anticipated a possible happening like this after the Second World War and arranged to handle many more simultaneous arrivals. Now, it's too late."

"Yes, we're only equipped to take care of about ten thousand an hour," said Wang Yui. "I shouldn't like to be on the Receiving Staff and have to check one hundred million life records."

"It's an unthinkable situation," declared Herbert Stanley Lawrence, "and I see only one way out of it. We're helpless to do anything in Heaven that can take care of them. This leaves us with no alternative but to *prevent* their coming!"

"Prevent it? How?" demanded Pierre Loubet.

"Go to work on the minds of those in charge of Earth affairs and influence them to call off this atomic war before it starts!" said England's former exchequer. "Appeal to the Guardian Angels to save us! Tell them Heaven can't stand any over-crowding. We haven't accommodations! They'll just have to keep those humans alive and let them come over here at their appointed times ...or hold off the next war until we can expand our facilities! This is the way out, gentlemen! I can see it very clearly! Can't you?"

"Yes yes!" came a chorus of assenting voices, and all looked inquiringly toward the Great One. He smiled, approvingly.

"You have decided wisely. Heaven must throw all its resources into stopping this Atomic War. If this can't be done, there will be chaos in Paradise!"

IT WAS night on earth, in the vicinity of the United States Government's

atomic project at Los Alamos, New Mexico. Professor T. Everett Finley, Director of the Project and credited with being the nuclear physicist whose genius had contributed most toward development of the first successful atomic bomb, was worried. He had been enormously concerned since the conclusion of World War II which had not led to the predicted peace but only to a more feverish race for development and possession of greater weapons of destruction. No satisfactory agreement had ever been reached between the United States and Great Britain, with Russia, over control of atomic power. Long since, the Soviet Union had demonstrated that this government also knew how to make and produce atom bombs.

"It's just a question of time," global authorities had opined, "when West and East, who cannot get together on their ideologies, will clash in open warfare and the fight for world power will be on again."

This was what worried the head of the Los Alamos Atomic Project. Would Russia, distrusting and fearing the United States, risk all in a surprise attack and in the hope that her atomic bombs would so cripple her western enemy that the war would be won in the opening bombardment?

Hardboiled, realistic-minded Secretary of Defense Bill Engle thought so! Furthermore, he had recommended to the military cabinet this night that the United States attack first, whether or not so permitted by Constitution, to save the country from destruction. Each day's delay in such action, in Secretary Engle's opinion, courted national disaster.

Director T. (Tom for short) Everett Finley, had taken issue with the Secretary and his Board, meeting in special private session at the atomic bombing experimental site.

"It means disaster to attacker and attacked, no matter who strikes first," he had warned. "For this reason, we should hold off on the slightest possible chance that war can be averted entirely."

There was reason for hope that, despite delicately strained relations, no conflict would occur. Just one week before, Secretary of Defense Engle had announced to the world that Professor Finley, continuing his study of reactions of nuclei bombarded by deuterons, had discovered a new method of atomic fission which increased the explosive power of an atomic bomb one hundred times its hitherto known capacity.

This announcement, carried to all corners of the world in glaring headlines, had been deliberately calculated to cause postponement in the Soviet Union's plan of conquest.

"The United States is already manufacturing bombs of this proficiency and adding them to its defensive stockpile," the announcement stated.

This was "almost true." Equipment was being set up at the Los Alamos project which would soon be turning out these superior weapons. But, in the "cold war of nerves" it was considered imperative strategy to warn Russia at this precise moment on the strength of disquieting news that the Russian Bear was poised to strike.

Tonight, returning to his bachelor apartment from the military conference, Tom Finley could not compose himself for sleep. He had a sense of impending catastrophe, a strange foreboding. Attired in bathrobe and slippers, he paced the floor, from living room, to bedroom, to kitchenette. Not a drinking man, he braced himself with hot coffee, chewed on the stem of his pipe, blew agitated smoke rings, and stared troubledly at the wall.

What was wrong with him? He hadn't felt like this—ever. Not even during the tests, the releasing of the first atomic

bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the many experiments since. Something ominous was in the atmosphere, oppressive, disturbing.

His notes on the new process for making atomic bombs—why should he think of them? They were locked in his file at the Laboratory five miles away. Perfectly safe, of course—or, *were* they? The place was strongly guarded. Every employee and research worker carefully screened, coming and going.

TOM stopped pacing and sat on the edge of a chair. He glanced at his wrist watch. A quarter to one a. m. Sometimes when he felt restless like this a new idea was trying to break through. If it wasn't so late he'd get out his car and drive to the Lab. Putter around there by himself. Or, perhaps one of his co-workers would be there. These crazy scientists never knew when to quit thinking. Some of them did their best work between midnight and dawn. That Russian-American, Dr. Androv Anapol often worked the clock around. Brilliant fellow—a brain like Einstein's. Great physicist. How he hated everything Communist!

Why the instant Androv had learned of Tom's new discovery which would vastly increase the explosive power of atomic bombs, he had exulted: "Now we shouldn't wait! Wipe out the ruling class in Russia! Get them before they get us! Just one of these new bombs will do it. That will end the Communistic menace for all time!"

For a man, born in Russia, to feel this strongly was really something! Tom, even as a native American, couldn't feel this way. He was still nauseated at recollection of the bomb droppings on the Japanese. He'd had no control over this in the frantic race to beat the Germans to atomic warfare.

A sudden thought knifed into Tom's consciousness. Could it be possible that Androv was just a bit too pronounced in his denunciation of Communism and Russia? Did this mean anything? Was he actually as bitter as he was professing?

Tom resumed pacing. What was happening to his mind tonight? Why should he suddenly be suspicious of Androv? He'd worked with him since the start of the atomic project when he had supervised the research efforts of more than thirty-five hundred scientists. Few of them had known the complete story of what the project was all about, each faithfully performing his appointed task, and most of them being as astounded as those in the outside world when they learned that they had aided in creating and producing the world's first atomic bomb. Androv had been among these, some of his original researches contributing to vital deductions and developments in plotting the course of atomic fission.

"I must be going nuts" said Tom, to himself. "I'll not be trusting myself next. Guess the tension is finally getting me!"

His thoughts, for no seeming reason, went from Androv to Clare Logan, one of the few women scientists on the project. Raven-haired blue-eyed, vivacious Clare who had proved that a woman could be beautiful and not dumb. What a mind *she* had! They had practiced telepathy together, sending and receiving. Some results, too. Enough to convince them that, with time and practice and sufficient faith in their ability to transmit and receive thoughts, reasonable success could be attained. One day mental communication would be common place. Just as natural as tuning in on a radio....

Wait a minute! Could Clare be trying to reach him now? He felt her presence strongly. Should he phone her at this hour? She lived with her mother, in the same apartment house, two floors below.

Tom crossed to the phone and took up the receiver. Nearly one-fifteen. She must still be up. He was certain of it now—he could sense her mind contacting his. At least this excited, urgent sensation was similar to the feelings he always got when they were consciously experimenting.

Tom dialed her number and waited impatiently as the phone commenced ringing. Here was the girl he should have married long ago. When this Russian crisis was settled, why not propose and, if she accepted him, take a long leave of absence and try to forget atomic bombs and world destruction? This was a good idea...best he'd had in years!... No one was answering...oh, yes—at last!

"Hello...Oh Mrs. Logan! Did I wake you?...This is Tom!"

"Oh, yes, Tom...excuse me, I was dozing in my chair, waiting for Clare... She went to the Lab around eight... something special she wanted to work on ...what time is it?...After *one?*...Why, she said she'd be home by midnight!... Where are you?"

"I'm in my apartment."

"Well, I suppose she'll be home any minute. Shall I have her call?"

"No thanks. Never mind. It's not important. I'll see her in the morning. Good night!"

Tom put the receiver down and stood for a moment, palm against his forehead.

"Not home yet. That doesn't mean anything. But I wish I didn't feel so upset for no apparent reason. I . . ."

The world's Number One Atomic Scientist crossed to the divan, sank down upon it, leaned back against the pillows and relaxed. He made his Conscious mind passive, stilled his thoughts and listened mentally.

Instantly a flashing awareness came to him. Now he knew what had caused his feeling of great uneasiness. Clare was in trouble of some sort—desperate trouble—and had been trying to reach him mentally. He was sure of it!

"Okay, Clare!" he said aloud, willing his thoughts toward her. "You've got through to me...I'm coming!"

TOM leaped from the divan stripping off his bathrobe and kicking out of his slippers. In less than two minutes he was dressed, out the door, and in the self-service elevator heading for the apartment house basement and garage.

"Took me a long time to get her message!" he raged, inwardly. "Wonder how long she's been sending?"

Joe, the night man in the garage, backed out his car.

"This is like old times, Mr. Finley... I mean – like during the war – when you'd get ideas in the middle of the night like this...and shoot out of here! What are you going to invent this time?"

"A rat killer!" said the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, and drove out of the garage with Joe's boisterous haw-haw roaring after him.

The five miles to the entrance to the Laboratories and Proving Grounds was covered in a little over five minutes. As he drew up to the gate, armed guards blocked his path.

"Oh, Mr. Finley!" they greeted, and lowered their guns.

One of them picked up a telephone in the booth and notified the guard inside. The gate swung open and Tom stepped on the gas.

It was a winding road to the Laboratory building where his own special department was located. There were lights on the ground floor.

"She's still here!" he told himself. "Maybe I've just been imagining things."

He swung his car into the parking lot beside the building, jumped out and ran up the steps to the door. It was locked but the guard inside answered

his summons immediately. Private First Class Al Dickey on duty. He grinned as he handed the Director the book to "sign in."

"Grave-yard shift for you tonight, sir?"

"Guess so," rejoined Tom, abstractedly, as he signed, noting the other "after hour" signatures. "Well, I see Dr. Anapol and Miss Logan are working tonight," he observed.

"Yes, sir. They're the only ones. Pretty quiet around here."

Tom noted the times of arrival. Clare had signed in first, around eight-thirty-five. . .Androv had recorded his entrance at five after twelve! Why so late. . .Had Clare decided to stay on with him for some reason?

All departments were kept locked, at all times. The office of the Director was in the rear of the building, at the end of the large Laboratory room. With a feeling of vibrant concern, Tom slipped his own key in the lock and let himself in, closing the door softly. He restrained an impulse to ask the guard to stand by. If his impressions should be wrong—if everything was okay—such disclosure of anxiety or suspicion would make a fool of him.

Inside the laboratory, Tom heard the guard lock the door behind him. No one else but the Director carried a key. All other scientists and research workers had to press a buzzer to be let out of the Laboratory. These safety precautions gave the place a penitentiary air but they afforded maximum protection against any possible disturbance arising with or without which might threaten atomic secrecy.

Lights were on but a quick glance disclosed that neither Androv or Clare were in sight. Stepping lightly on the composition floor which was almost soundless, Tom walked down a side aisle, next the wall, toward his office. The door was closed but he now saw that there was a light inside. Androv and Clare were there! They had to be. There was no other place of concealment from the Laboratory proper. And this meant that the door lock had been picked or broken for he alone held a key to this private room containing his personal files.

"Oh, no!" he cried to himself. "Not that!"

They couldn't be acting in collusion! He'd have bet his life on Clare's loyalty and trustworthiness, Androv's, too—until this sudden, inexplainable wonderment had hit him.

Approaching the door from the side so that his shadow would not be thrown on the glass panel, Tom took hold of the knob and turned it, cautiously. The door swung inward, noiselessly.

Against the side wall was a sofa he had put in during war days when he often spent the night at the Lab. On this sofa was stretched the bound and gagged form of Clare. She was conscious and lying so that she could see him. Commingled relief and fear registered in her eyes as she raised her head slightly and gave a warning nod in the direction of Tom's desk, not yet within the range of his vision.

In war time the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project had carried a gun. He had none on him now. But cold fury flamed in Tom Finley. He could hear the rustling of papers. He didn't have to see to know that Androv was rifling his files, searching madly, no doubt, for notes on his latest atomic bomb developments. The whole story wasn't there — was never kept in one place — but there was enough for a man with a mind like Androv's to piece much together, if he had time to study it out and fit in the missing parts.

TOM had been an athlete in college. He was still under forty and in

good physical shape. Androv, about the same age, was short and stocky, with powerful shoulders and arms. In a rough and tumble tussle it should be about even, with Tom's greater height and reach a possible determining factor. In that split second the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project gave no thought to the summoning of outside aid. He would handle this "inside job" himself.

Swinging the door wide, Tom charged in. Androv was behind the desk with masses of papers, blue prints and letters about him. Drawers from the steel files were on the floor. The whole room was in wild disorder.

It was impossible to get to the former Russian because of the litter. He was temporarily barricaded behind a mass of material.

Tom stopped short of the desk and the two men exchanged tense glances.

"What's the matter, Androv—you gone mad?"

For answer, Tom found himself looking into the merciless barrel of a Colt automatic.

"Stay where you are!" Androv commanded. "There's not going to be another world war because I won't permit it. I've got your secret now—and Russia will have it in the next forty-eight hours. She can make this bigger bomb as quickly as you can. Turn your back to me, Tom Finley!"

Tom hesitated. He shot a quick look at Clare whose eyes were white with terror. She gestured beseechingly with her head for him to obey.

"You wouldn't dare shoot!" he said. Any sound will bring the guards. You're locked in here. You're a fool, Androv. You can't get away with this!"

The former Russian's finger twitched against the trigger. With his free hand he grabbed up a sheaf of papers he had sorted in a pile, and stuffed them in an inside pocket.

"I'll shoot if you force me. It's freedom or death for me now, anyway. Turn your back!"

Tom could sense that the desperate Androv wasn't bluffing. Men working on the atomic project weren't cowards. They had faced possible death every day for years. A threat against their lives meant little or nothing. But a dead Director of the Atomic Project could be of no service whatsoever. Androv would probably truss him up as he had Clare and then try to make a get-away. He would most certainly be caught and his conviction after that would be equally certain.

Tom slowly turned his back. Behind him he heard Androv kick a metal drawer out of the way and move around the desk. There was a muffled warning sound from Clare. Tom felt his flesh prickle as a flash of realization came to him. Androv wasn't going to tie him up, he was going to slug him with the butt of his gun! He could sense the descending arm and with an instinctive movement he tried to duck.

A skull cracking blow struck him back of the right ear and sent him reeling, dizzily. He caught a glimpse of Clare, head upraised, struggling frenziedly with her bounds, body straining and twisting on the sofa. Whirling dazedly about, Tom attempted to grapple with Androv, but another blow knocked him to his knees and sent blinding flashes of pain zig-zagging through his brain. The light went out of his eyes and darkness commenced closing in. Face upturned, on both knees, trying to see—Tom felt about with his hands. Something hot was running down over his forehead, covering eyes and nose and mouth, choking him. He had a sickening sensation of sinking—of his body falling away from him—and then a final hammering blow—and darkness!

CHAPTER II

WHEN a man loses consciousness, he cannot tell when he begins to regain it whether he has been unconscious for a million years or only a few seconds. It was this way with Tom.

Someone was calling his name, very properly, "T. Everett Finley." The voice was resounding down a long corridor and echoing and re-echoing so that the T. Everett piled on top of one another and then blurred into a jumble of Finleys.

It felt like his identity was trying to reassemble itself.

"That's my name," he heard himself saying. "That's who I am. T. Everett Finley. What do they want? Who's calling? Where am I?"

All was darkness about him. To his surprise, he was standing upright. The lights. Somebody's turned off the lights. That was the trouble. His mind wasn't tracking. What had he been doing? Was he in his apartment? Tom stretched out hands in the now weird half light and tried to see and feel about him. There were no familiar objects or outlines. He seemed to be standing in space!

Sudden uncanny panic seized him.

"Help!" he cried. "I can't see!... Help, somebody!...Help!"

His words came back to him from seemingly every direction. He was apparently in a great echo chamber, in no identifiable place—and alone!

What had happened? He couldn't remember. Oh, yes—now it was coming back to him—as though from a great distance. Androv ... the gun ... Clare, bound and gagged on the sofa ... the blow on the head ... darkness ...!

He must be in his own office ... but everything was blacked out. All he could see was a billowing gray mist.

"Clare!" he called.

She wasn't there. Nothing was there. No one and no thing but T. Everett Finley! He was having a nightmare. That was it! The blow had knocked him silly. He'd have to snap out of this and give the alarm. Androv mustn't get away.

The gray mist swirled in front of him and a brisk figure stepped out of it, black-haired, dark-eyed, attired in a trimly tailored white suit.

"Hello, Tom!" he greeted. "Sorry to keep you waiting—but I honestly didn't think you were going to leave your body this soon."

"Leave my body!" Tom looked down at himself and pinched seemingly solid arms and chest and legs. "I have my body, thank you—and I'm not in the habit of leaving it, anywhere."

The man in white looked amused.

"Of course you've got a body—but it's not the same kind you had on earth."

"On *earth?*" Tom had never had a nightmare like this one. He'd have to break out of it somehow. "See here! I've got to wake up. I'm in trouble. The atomic secrets. We're in danger of losing them. I was hit on the head. I can't think! . . . "

The figure in white regarded him sympathetically.

"I know all about it but you're out of that picture now, so you'll just have to calm down and...!"

"What do you mean I'm 'out of it'?" demanded Tom becoming more acutely conscious and more and more concerned. "The girl I love—I mean—Clare Logan — she's tied up...Androv may have escaped...the guards may not know... I've been knocked out...if you're holding me here, wherever this is — let me go. This is serious, I tell you! It may mean the end of all life on this planet!"

"I know that, too," said the man in white. "Things are in a frightful mess. You'll have to help from this side of

life."

Tom stared incredulously at the presence in front of him.

"Stop talking like that. You're trying to confuse me. I'll be all right when I wake up."

"That's what you've just done — wakened in the astral plane. You may as well know it, T. Everett Finley, you're the next thing, right now, to being *dead!*"

This statement was a shocker.

"Dead?...I may be rather hazy in my mind just this moment, but I'm not dead!"

"Take it easy! I see I've got to prove a few things to you—but there's plenty of time."

Tom felt a sensation of frustration.

"That's where you're wrong!" he protested. "There isn't any time. If Russia gets our latest atomic secrets...!"

"She'll get them," informed the man in white. "They're on the way there now. Your former colleague, Androv Anapol, is on a Russian plane, headed for Moscow...!"

"No! You mean — he got away...?"

"No trouble at all. He just signed out, told the guard that you and Miss Logan were still working, got into his car, drove sixty miles into the desert and boarded a Russian plane waiting for him there."

"YOU'RE lying!" Tom pounded his forehead and tried to rouse himself. "How do *you* know about this? Who are you, anyway?"

The man in white bowed, apologetically.

"Oh, pardon me! I've been with you so long, I thought you knew. I'm your Guardian Angel!"

"My — *what?*"

"Don't look so astonished. All humans have guardian angels."

"I don't believe it!" said T. Everett Finley, with all the conviction of his previous concepts. "In the first place, there aren't any guardian angels. In the second place, if there were, you don't look like one."

"What's the matter?" smiled the man in white. "You expect me to be sporting wings and a harp?"

"I've never given it a thought. This isn't really happening. My brain must have been injured. I can't think straight."

"That's really because you're not quite dead," explained the presence in white. "It's harder this way. You see, your physical body is in the government hospital in Los Alamos. You've got a couple of skull fractures and you're in what the doctors call a 'coma'. They don't expect you to live."

Tom tried to comprehend his present situation. He had nothing by which to compare it. This state of being, if true, was an entirely new experience.

"You're right," he admitted. "I was hit on the head. It's news to me that I was hurt that badly. But how can I be in a coma in one place — and conscious here?"

The man in white smiled. "Because," he explained, "your physical body is not the real you. It's just the instrument your soul operates through on Earth. Once it's seriously damaged, your soul can't function in it. When you break tubes in your radio, you can't get any reception, can you? But the programs are still in the ether around you. They haven't died because your radio is dead."

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project had listened, soberly. His mind was getting more collected. If he was actually alive outside his body, this was a phenomenon greater than the splitting of the atom! He studied the presence in front of him, noting, for the first time, that there was a strange familiarity in his features.

"You have me at a great disadvantage," he confessed, helplessly. "You seem to know all about me—and all that has happened. I feel like I'm just coming out of a fog. But I'd like to know more about you. As I look at you now —I am getting the strange impression that I am looking at myself. Your face, your general appearance — well, you could almost pass as my twin!"

The man in white nodded. "I have been waiting for you to notice this," he said, quietly. "It is true—I *do* resemble you. I always will. That's because I'm really your Higher Self!"

"My Higher Self!" Tom repeated, startled.

"That's right. The Higher Self of every soul is his or her Guardian Angel. I came into being with your first good conscious thought or deed. I am your spiritual link to higher and higher soul development — the sum total of your finest qualities and the promise of greater achievements to come."

Tom stared hard and searchingly at this reflection of the higher side of himself. A penetrating question was forming in his consciousness and as it did so, there appeared beside the figure in white, a second figure—also resembling him—but dressed in black.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I am your Lower Self," this figure announced. "Don't you recognize me?"

Tom recoiled, putting hands over his eyes.

"No!" he cried. "No! Go away! Get out of here!"

He looked again and the figure in black was gone. The figure in white smiled at him.

"You're the boss! Your D. H. hasn't any power unless you give him power. Neither have I, for that matter. We can't operate against your Free Will and Free Choice. When you told him to go, he had to go!"

"But where did he go?"

"He retired within your consciousness! He owes his existence to you. He is the evil you have created in life. That's why we call these Lower Selves of humans D. H.'s."

"What's a 'D. H.' ?"

"A *Devil's Helper!*"

T. Everett Finley's earth concepts rebelled.

"Oh, come now! There isn't any devil — any hell! Those are man-made phantasms and fantasies!"

"On the contrary, the evil that man does lives after him, too. He isn't changed in the 'twinkling of an eye.' The spirit of evil that Man has expressed through the Ages is personified in what you call 'The Devil.' He's a very real being and will be, until Man destroys him by rising out of his Lower Self into his Higher."

TOM'S mind weighed this statement on the scales of Reason and Logic.

"The old Principle of Cause and Effect I suppose?" he conjectured.

"That's it," smiled the higher reflection of himself. "It appiles throughout the Universe. As long as you hold to me, I'll lead you higher and connect you with the realms beyond—as long as you hold to your Lower Self, he'll lead you lower and connect you with the realms below. It's as simple as that—and this process has been going on since the world began!"

"We can see that in the attraction and repulsion of atoms," said Tom. "But we've never gotten around to relating it to humans!" Then his thoughts went back to earth. "But I've got to live. There's a big job to do. If Russia. . . !"

"Yes," agreed the man in white. "Something has to be done. You could do more if you were either dead or alive —but it's pretty complicating with you in this 'in-between' state. You don't

belong either on Earth or in Heaven."

"What do you mean 'heaven'?"

"Your first existence after death. That is what you humans have been calling it. Be confusing to change its name now."

"You mean it's a real place?" asked Tom, incredulously.

"Certainly! Isn't Earth a real place? Can you conceive of there being *no* place in the Universe? Everywhere is some place and something is happening everywhere! I'm not telling you anything you don't know — I'm just reminding you!"

T. Everett Finley looked feelingly at this higher image of himself.

"I think," he said, "that I'm beginning to like you. I hope you won't let me forget anything I need to know."

The man in white patted his shoulder with a show of sudden affection.

"I've always tried to do that — but there've been times when your Lower Self wouldn't let me."

Tom reached out a hand.

"Well, stick close to me now. I need you. I don't want to see that man in black any more than I have to. I don't like his looks!"

"He'll be around," warned the man in white, "every chance he gets. And he'll use all the power of your Lower Self to try to influence you against me—just as he's always done!"

"We'll fight him!" Tom announced, with a surge of resolution. "I guess I've needed a Guardian Angel. So you've been with me all my life! And what a life it's been!"

Vivid scenes commenced to flash in Tom's memory stream. Some were tinged with feelings of hatred, jealousy, selfish ambition, and lust. He looked around him.

There was the man in black, grinning and beckoning!

"Get away! Get out!"

"But you called me!"

"No, I didn't! I'm through with you!"

The man in white turned on the man in black.

"You heard what he said!"

"But he doesn't mean it!" persisted Tom's personalized Lower Self.

"Oh, yes, I do!" declared Tom. "I've had enough of you. I'm following my . . ." he swallowed hard and continued, ". . . my Guardian Angel from now on!"

The man in black laughed a mocking laugh but his form began to fade until it and the laugh died away into nothingness.

Tom, relieved, turned to the man in white.

"You see," said this higher reflection of him, "there's just a thin dividing line between Good and Evil. You've had a tug of war all through life. Everybody does. Your Will decided what you will do and which way you will go."

"Then there's a real hell?"

"Why not? Can you picture some of the humans you've known going to heaven?"

"I didn't think anyone went anywhere after death—except into dust." Tom's consciousness was stabbed with another question. "What becomes of a Guardian Angel if a person, like myself, should go to Hell?"

The man in white smiled. "Oh, we live as long as any good lives in you."

"You mean—you would go to hell with me?"

"No—I'd be walled out from Hell. I'd have to wait for you outside, if you ever should come out. You'd be in the company of your Lower Self there."

Tom grimaced. "You mean — my 'D.H.'?"

"That's right—your Devil's Helper. He'd do all in his power, having gotten you there, to make you stay."

"Pleasant picture," said Tom, grimly. "Do many ever get out of Hell once they go there?"

"Quite a few. You take just what you *are* to Hell. What you *can be* is left outside in the image of your Higher Self which never descends that low. This image gradually withers and dies for lack of nourishment if you basically become more evil than good...But if the good in you fights its way back to ascendancy, all Hell, the Devil and His Helpers can't hold you."

"Well, that's a *little* reassuring," said Tom. "I'd like to get out of this semi-dark place. How long have I been unconscious, anyway?"

"Since sixteen minutes to two a.m." responded the man in white. "And it's ten in the morning now."

"Tell me what's happened and what's happening now! This is terrible—being away off here, not being able to do anything!"

The man in white looked down through the gray mist.

"The Military Board is holding an investigation of what happened," he reported. "They're cross-examining Miss Logan. Would you like to look in on them?"

"Could I?" Tom asked, eagerly.

"Take my hand. I'll arrange it for you. Your Higher Self has the power to travel where you Will. Right use of desire can take you anywhere on earth in your astral body."

"Will we be seen?"

"No! We will be in the same room with them but these forms have a higher vibration beyond the range of normal eyesight or sense perception."

"Very interesting! Where are we now?"

"In the atmosphere above the hospital where your physical body is reposing."

"How do we get to where the investigation is being held?"

"It's in the conference room of the Administration Building. Just hold my hand and *will* yourself there!"

Tom did as directed and the mists disappeared. He had the sensation of being whisked somewhere with the speed of light.

CHAPTER III

"NOW, Miss Logan," Secretary of Defense Bill Engle was saying, "Will you please tell the members of this Military Board, in your own words, just what transpired in the Laboratories and Office of the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project early this morning?"

A tight-lipped, highly tense but exotically attractive dark-haired woman, seated in the witness chair of an informal investigative court, nodded.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Louder, please, so all can hear!"

The Secretary of Defense was eyeing her in almost undisguised admiration of her beauty, commingled with a feeling of suspicion. He had met her on several occasions while calling upon Tom Finley but she had been busy at her work, plainly attired and intent on her duties. He, too, had been concentrating on other matters. But now that she was before him, for cross-examination, attired in a gray suit with softly feminine lines, black hair naturally waved about her earnest, spirited face, he was suddenly aware that he was in the presence of a brilliant, courageous woman who possessed extraordinary physical appeal.

"After dinner last night," began Miss Logan, "I decided to return to the Laboratory to complete notes I had been making on some research just completed. I took a cab and checked in around eight-thirty-five. I was the only one in our department and had just completed my work and was ready to

leave when Androv Anapol came in."

"About what time was that?" interceded the Secretary of Defense, as all board members gave close attention.

"A little after twelve," continued the only woman scientist in Director Finley's division. "I could see, by the way Androv greeted me that he wasn't pleased to find me there. I had the feeling he had been waiting somewhere on the grounds, hoping whoever was in the Laboratory would finish up and go home. There was such a strange urgency about him that I decided to remain awhile, on the pretense that I still had other things to do"

"Just a moment," broke in Secretary Engle. "Had you ever had cause to be suspicious of this man before?"

"No. On the contrary, I had such admiration for his remarkable mind and his splendid research work, we often discussed problems together."

Her blue eyes met his, wavered, and looked away, under his intense personal gaze.

"Dr. Anapol, by any chance, never displayed any romantic interest in you?"

A flush came into her face. "None, whatsoever!" she denied.

"I'm sorry," said the Secretary. "Go on!"

"It's hard to explain what you might call a woman's intuition," said Miss Logan. "But I just knew in a flash that Dr. Anapol had something of a dubious nature in mind. He asked me how long I expected to remain and I said I didn't know how long it would take me. He fussed around his desk and walked over to his section of the Laboratory and then returned to his desk, sat down, smoked several cigarettes, kept darting glances at his wrist watch, and then got up and came over to where I was working."

"About what time was this?"

"I should say—around twelve-thirty."

"What had you hoped to do by remaining?"

Miss Logan hesitated. "Looking back now, I don't know. I wasn't scared. I was just curious at his actions. And because I was sure he wanted to get rid of me, I decided to stay on and see what would happen."

"Might it not have been possible that Dr. Anapol simply wanted to be alone—feeling he could work better?"

Clare Logan shook her head. "Positively not. I had been present many other nights when he and others were working—and it had never bothered him. Last night his entire attitude was different. Almost antagonistic. Now, of course, after what took place, I know why. He had to operate on a fixed schedule—to get what he was after and make connections in the desert with that Russian plane. . . ."

"You're getting ahead of your story," said the Secretary of Defense. "Give it to us chronologically, as you remember it, please."

THERE was a stir in the atmosphere of the conference room, unobserved by those present and Tom Finley, escorted by his self-styled Guardian Angel, arrived. They took seats up front in two empty chairs on a side aisle, not far from Clare Logan and Secretary of Defense Engle.

"This is great!" Tom whispered to his companion in white.

"You don't need to whisper!" said his Guardian Angel. "They can't hear us."

Tom nodded and grinned. This experience he was undergoing was commencing to appeal as an adventure.

"Say," he said. "You may be my Higher Self but I can't call you by my name—and if we're going to travel around together, I've got to call you

something. What do you suggest?"

The man in white smiled. "Just make it G.A.!"

"G.A.?"

"Yes—that's short for Guardian Angel."

"So it is! That's simple enough! Okay—from now on, you're G.A.!"

Tom looked around him, enjoying the realization that he could not be seen or heard. He knew every member of this fifteen man Military Cabinet, now in Los Alamos from Washington, making a survey of latest atomic developments. They were a shocked appearing group now and well they might be. When the papers got wind of this sensational theft of atomic secrets, it would rouse the entire world.

Clare Logan! She was the center of attention now. Not that she usually wasn't, in a crowd of men. But this was perhaps one of the tensest moments of her entire life. And Secretary of Defense Bill Engle—how he was staring at her! She sensed it, too, and was disturbed.

"You were telling us, Miss Logan," Secretary Engle reminded, "that Dr. Anapol finally left his desk and came over to you . . . ."

"Oh—oh, yes," said Clare, pressing fingers against her temples. "I expected him to speak but he suddenly sprang at me—grabbed me by the throat, cut off my breath and told me if I screamed or made any sound, he'd kill me. Then he pressed a gun against my side, forced my hands behind me, and slipped a cord around them. He tied it so tightly that it cut into the flesh at my wrists. You can see the marks yet . . . ."

She held out her arms and exhibited skin-reddened circles.

"Having done that, he stuffed one of his handkerchiefs in my mouth and forced me down on the floor beside my desk. Then he went to Mr. Finley's private office and, to my surprise, produced a key and unlocked it. He came back, picked me up and carried me inside to the sofa where he also wound cord around my ankles and tied my feet securely."

"Did he say anything during this time?"

"Not a word," said Clare. "He closed the office door and went to work on the private files. In no time he had forced the locks and was going through the drawers looking for the special atomic information."

"What did you do meanwhile?" interrupted Secretary Engle.

"What *could* I do?" retorted Clare. "This may sound ridiculous to you—but I lay there, *willing* my thoughts toward Tom—I mean, Mr. Finley!"

Members of the Military Board looked surprised, then amused. Tom, at mention of his name, stiffened, with interest.

"What did you think this might accomplish?" asked the head of the investigating group.

"Well—Mr. Finley and I had done some experimenting in telepathy, from time to time, as a kind of a game," said Clare, a bit embarrassed. "And I thought . . . I'd gotten myself mixed up in a pretty desperate situation . . . if I could just reach his mind and impress him to think of me . . . and perhaps give him the urge to come to the Lab . . . ."

The Secretary of Defense scratched his chin and rolled his tongue inside his cheeks.

"And I suppose you think that because Mr. Finley *did* show up—that it was in answer to your mental call . . . ?"

A FLASH of defiance shone in the blue eyes. "I certainly do! What else would have brought him to the Lab at that hour? He phoned me at home

shortly after I was attacked—and when Mother told him I was at the Lab, even though she was expecting me home any minute, he went there to look me up!"

The Military Board members eyed one another with varying degrees of skepticism.

"Remarkable coincidence, anyway!" conceded Secretary Engle. "Although I don't suppose Mr. Finley was in the habit of phoning you around midnight or later?"

"He was not!" declared Clare. "This was the first time. That's all the more proof . . . .!"

Tom, growing more and more interested in the proceedings, nudged the man in white, seated next to him.

"I *did* get her thoughts! And I can read Bill Engle's thoughts right now!"

His Guardian Angel smiled. "Yes, that's one thing you can do from this side of life. You can perceive what those in the flesh are thinking. What do you sense is on his mind?"

"Sex!" announced Tom, "and the object is Clare Logan. He's fallen for her in a terrific way . . . and I don't like it!"

"Why not?"

"Because I'm crazy about her, too!"

His Guardian Angel laughed.

"What's so funny about this?" Tom demanded, feelingly.

"Nothing, except that you had years on earth to tell her how much you loved her—and you didn't do it. Now it may be too late!"

"I took myself and my work too seriously," reflected Tom, remorsefully. "But I'm not dead yet. I've got to get back in my body. She's one woman in a million. If I'm unable to . . . .!"

"Listen!" commanded his Guardian Angel. "She's talking again."

"Androv must have taken about twenty minutes going through everything in the files and making a small stack of the papers and blueprints he wanted. Then, although I didn't hear Tom—or rather, Mr. Finley, come in—I saw the office door open. There he was, I warned him as best I could to be careful but he threw the door wide and leaped in. Androv held him off with a gun. I thought, for an instant, he was going to shoot both of us. Instead, he ordered Mr. Finley to turn his back. When he did so, Androv struck him a heavy blow with the butt of his revolver which almost knocked him down. Then he slugged him again and, as he fell to his knees, he let him have it once more. Mr. Finley fell forward on his face, gushing blood."

"You saw all this?"

"Yes—from the sofa. I rolled off and tried to trip up Dr. Anapol by kicking him when he was hitting Mr. Finley—but it wasn't any use."

"Did he do anything more to you?"

"Not a thing. He stepped over my body to pick up a few more of Mr. Finley's notes and papers, then went in the bathroom off Mr. Finley's office and washed some blood from his hands and straightened up his clothes and brushed his hair."

"Mr. Finley was unconscious?"

"Absolutely. He was out after the second blow."

"Then what happened?"

"Dr. Anapol came out and stood for a moment and looked down at me. 'I'm sorry I had to do this,' he said. 'I liked Tom. I suppose, to play safe, I should kill you—but you can't stop my get-away now. Good night—and goodbye!' "

"That was all? He left after that?"

Clare Logan nodded, now suddenly weary and exhausted. She lowered her head in her hands.

"Yes," she said, tremulously.

"No, you skipped something," said Tom. "Tell them what Androv said to

me as he held me off with the gun!"

Almost as though she had heard him, Clare raised her head. "Oh, there is one more thing," she recalled. "It may be significant. Dr. Anapol said to Mr. Finley, just before he struck him, that there wasn't going to be another world war if he could help it. He said Russia would have these latest secrets in forty-eight hours—and that she could make a bigger bomb as quickly as we could."

Clare lowered her head again and burst into a low sob. Tom rose up and started toward her but the man in white restrained him.

"You forget where you are!" he reminded. "She couldn't see or feel you."

"I'm not so sure about that," resisted Tom. "She reacted right away to my suggestion . . . and we'd trained ourselves to be close in thought. I believe I could reach her."

"Not now!" warned his Guardian Angel. "It isn't the time. Her mind and her emotions are too upset."

"Hearing recessed," pronounced Secretary of Defense Engle, rising from his chair and advancing to the woman whose testimony had been listened to so attentively. He put a hand on her shoulder and patted it, a little too intimately to suit Tom, who winced.

"Sorry to put you through this, Miss Logan," said the head of the Military Board, "but we had to get to the bottom of this right away. I accept your story as substantially correct. You can go now but stand by at home for further inquiry. I want to see you, personally, in any event, before I return to Washington."

The look Secretary Engle gave her was unmistakable. Clare's blue eyes caught it but never let on.

"Yes, sir," she said, and stood up preparatory to leaving the room.

"One more thing," cautioned the man who directed the United States' military operations. "Say nothing to the press. When this story breaks it will be the hottest since the bursting of the first atomic bomb. This act may be the spark which starts the next world war!"

Clare's lips parted with an expression of horror as she said: "Oh, Mr. Engle, don't say that! We mustn't have another war! We mustn't!"

Then she turned and hastened from the room, fighting to keep her emotions under control.

CHAPTER IV

"WELL, G.A. where do we go from here?" Tom asked, of the man in white.

"It might be a good idea to go back to the hospital," said his Guardian Angel. "Since you're still not entirely free from your physical body, you ought to look in on it now and then. The doctors are holding a consultation over you at this moment, trying to decide when to operate."

"They've got to save my life!" said Tom. "This is all very interesting but I don't want to die yet."

"I know," smiled his G.A. "You realize, at last, that you've missed romance and you want to go back for it."

"That's partly true," Tom admitted, "but I want to see this atomic crisis through." He eyed the man in white questioningly. "Do I take your hand again?"

"Yes, you can't travel in the astral unless you are united with your Higher Self."

"All right, then. Here you are! Let's go!"

And—they were gone!

* * *

Release of the shocking news that the United States' top atomic bomb secrets had been stolen by a trusted Russian-

American scientist and were being flown to the Soviet Union by special Russian plane which had kept a rendezvous with Dr. Androv Anapol in the New Mexico desert, terrorized the world.

It had been felt that only Russia's failure to possess as effective atomic weapons as the Western Powers, had kept her from attacking, thus far. Now the possibility of war in the immediate future was vastly increased.

News, too, that Professor T. Everett Finley lay near death in the Los Alamos hospital as a result of the brutal assault upon him by one of his former associates, had aroused intense feeling. Some editorial writers began demanding that the United States no longer delay military operations but open an all-out attack upon Russia now, before it was too late.

Secretary of Defense Bill Engle, in a guarded statement to the press, said: "This is, without doubt, the most critical time in all world history. Decisions which will be made, in the next few days, as a result of this daring theft of our atomic secrets, may change the entire course of human events. Every American citizen must be prepared for any eventuality."

* * *

To be outside his physical body, capable of looking down upon it from a position in the atmosphere above the bed in the private hospital room, gave Tom Finley a strange sensation.

"You mean that's me down there?" he asked of his accompanying man in white.

"No, I've told you before—that's not the real you," explained his G.A. "That's only the body which the *real you* occupies while on Earth. This astral body which you're in now is connected by lines of magnetic force to your physical body and its connection won't be broken until your physical body dies. It has such a high vibration that it fits right inside the form of your physical body when you are there and you're not ordinarily aware you have a second body at all."

"That's right," reflected Tom. "I thought that body in bed was the only one I'd ever have. It seems incredible to me yet . . . !"

He gazed down at the four doctors and a nurse, gathered about the bed. His head was so wound in bandages that features were unrecognizable.

"I certainly look like a mess," he observed.

"He's not strong enough yet to risk a brain operation," Dr. Hayden was saying, after checking heart and lungs. "I'd advise that we wait and see if he survives the shock. There's no sign of returning consciousness. It's quite evident that the pressure of these fractures on the brain is severe. Operation at this time, however, in my opinion, would mean certain death. His chances of living are slight enough, without this—but I can say that he appears no worse than when I examined him earlier this morning."

"In other words," translated Tom, "in the familiar language of the profession, 'I appear to be holding my own'!"

His G.A. smiled. "It means that you may be out of your body for an indefinite period," he warned. "Some concussion cases don't come to for weeks."

"I can't wait that long!" said Tom, immediately concerned. "Too much is getting ready to happen!"

"You can't help yourself," said the man in white. "You can't recover from an injury like that over night. And you may not recover at all."

"Can't you see ahead in time and tell whether I will or not?" asked Tom.

The Guardian Angel shook his head. "No, and I wouldn't tell you if I could. Your job is to make the most of your

present moment, wherever you are."

"But I'm nowhere!" protested Tom. "I'm not on Earth and I'm not in Heaven. Just floating around in the atmosphere. It's a very unique sensation, I'll admit—but it's getting pretty monotonous. I don't think much of this 'in-between' world, if this is a sample."

The man in white laughed. "You haven't really seen it yet," he said. "I'll admit it's not much to look at—but you have more freedom of thought and motion here, as you'll soon discover."

TOM glanced about him. Nothing on all sides but this weird gray mist. Down below him was still the hospital room but the scene had changed. The doctors had left and the nurse was ushering in a woman of perhaps thirty in a trim gray suit which almost matched the color of the mist around him.

"There's not much point in seeing him," the nurse was saying. "He's unconscious."

"Clare!" cried Tom, and clutched the man in white by the arm. "Look! She's come to visit me!"

"I know," said his Guardian Angel, "and a time she had getting in, too. She rode to the hospital in the ambulance with you early this morning and she's listed herself as your nearest of kin in order to get to you."

"My nearest of kin!" said Tom. "Why she's not....!"

The man in white smiled. "But she could be—your *fiancee?*"

Tom started. "Did she tell them that?"

"Would you object if she had?"

"Well, no—not exactly. Oh, damn it! Why didn't I propose to her? But she *knew* how I felt or she wouldn't have done this!"

"She had a purpose, as you'll soon see," said his Guardian Angel. "Relax, Tom, old boy. You're getting all tensed up—and that's no good, even in an astral body. Keep quiet—watch and listen!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project gazed longingly at the attractive figure of Clare Logan, so near —and yet so far from him. She was standing now by the bedside, looking down at his body in the bed.

"Would it be possible?" she requested of the nurse. "Could you leave me alone with him—for just a few minutes?"

The nurse hesitated. "I really shouldn't."

Clare bowed her head. "Please!" she repeated.

The nurse retreated to the door. "All right, then, but don't be long or I'll have to . . . !"

The woman beside Tom's bed waved a reassuring hand and the nurse disappeared, pulling the door softly shut. Instantly Clare Logan moved to the head of the bed, knelt down and placed her lips close to Tom's ear.

"Tom!" she cried, in a low, appealing voice. "Tom—this is Clare! Can you hear me?" she took his hand and placed his fingers around hers. "Tom Finley! I'm trying to reach your mind. If you can't talk—but if you are getting my thoughts—can you press my hand—squeeze my fingers? Give me a sign, Tom! . . . You must live! Tom—this is I, Clare! . . . Squeeze my hand if you hear me!"

Through an act of Will, Tom lowered his astral body beside the woman at his bed.

"Yes, Clare, I hear you!" he said. "Look, Clare—can't you see me? . . . No, no—not there—right here! I'm putting my arm around you. Can't you feel it? . . . Clare, I love you! . . . I'm going to get well! . . . I'm going to live! . . . We'll outwit this guy Androv. We'll keep Russia from attacking us! . . . Clare,

look at me!"

The man in white had Tom's astral body by the arm.

"Stop making a fool of yourself!" he said. "She can't hear a word you're saying—and she can't feel your arm around her, either. You're just wasting psychic energy!'

"Tom," Clare was continuing, still talking into the unconscious form's ear.



"Tom!" she cried, in a low, appealing voice. "Tom—this is Clare! Can you hear me?"

"You got my mental call last night . . . you can get it again! Give me some sign that you hear me!"

Tom turned appealingly to his Guardian Angel. "How about it? Can't I, at least, squeeze her hand?"

"Not now. You've lost all power to consciously move your physical body. You'd have to be back in it to do anything and you can't get back in now until certain centers of your brain are cleared up."

"What a spot to be in!" moaned Tom. "I can hear her and see her and yet I can't let her know it!"

"That's happened to others countless times before," said his Guardian Angel, "but it's better this way. Most folks on earth would be scared to death if any loved one appeared to them. They think they'd like a visitation but they're not ready for such things. Miss Logan isn't, either. She'd jump right out of her shoes if she could see you now. But you might be able to contact her mentally. Why don't you try?"

"How do you mean?" asked Tom, hopefully.

"Concentrate like you used to do on earth, when you two were practicing telepathy," suggested the man in white. "It might work."

Tom did as directed, willing his thoughts toward the woman at his bedside.

"Clare, I can't press your hand, much as I'd like to. But I'm here! Right beside you! Can't you feel me?"

Clare lifted her head and slowly turned her gaze upward. She was looking directly at Tom's astral form but not seeing it. Her lips moved.

"Oh Tom—I can almost sense . . . it seemed like you spoke to me then. . . ."

She darted a quick glance down and back at the bandaged face and head on the pillow, muffling a sob as she patted his hand and released it.

"I almost got through to her!" cried Tom, excitedly. Then, forgetting for the moment their existence in different worlds, he poured out his feelings. "Clare, listen to me! You've got to carry on for me till I can get back in my body. Watch things at the Laboratory. And watch out for Bill Engle. He's a wolf!"

The man in white laughed. "You seem more worried about his interest in her than what may happen on Earth!"

"I am!" Tom admitted, "she means more to me than anything else on Earth. I'll tell her so, too—first chance I get!"

"She's going now," pointed his Guardian Angel. "She feels more relieved in mind."

Clare Logan was at the door, summoning the nurse.

"Thank you so much!" she was saying. "Please advise me if there is any change in his condition, for better or worse."

"Phone you at home?" asked the nurse.

"Yes, any time of the day or night!"

THE woman in Tom Finley's wavering life passed out of the room, down the glistening hospital corridor, into the noiseless elevator and out of the building on the ground floor where she hailed a taxi.

Tom, following, sat in the cab beside her. She was pensive on the drive to the apartment, staring straight ahead.

He placed his arm around her.

"Clare, I'm with you. I can read your thoughts. You are thinking of me—and you love me. I know it, now—and I love you. Why didn't we confess our feelings before? Why did we have to wait till something like this happened when it's so hard to reach each other?"

Clare, talking out loud, as though hearing, said: "You'd been working too

hard, for years, Tom. Your life was your research . . . mine, too . . . I was happy, just working near you . . . with you. But you mustn't die now . . . there isn't anyone can replace you . . . .!"

She didn't finish but Tom was getting the full impact of her thoughts in his consciousness. He tightened his arm about her and then started, self-consciously, as he observed the man in white seated on her other side.

"Can't you disappear once in awhile?" he demanded.

"I could," smiled his Guardian Angel. "But you need protection."

"Not right now, thank you—and I don't need a chaperone, either!"

The man in white faded from sight. As he did so, his place was taken by a figure in black.

"Greetings!" welcomed Tom's Lower Half. "It's about time you were paying some attention to me."

Tom's arm fell from about Clare's shoulders. She had given no sign of awareness that it had been there.

"What do I want with you?" asked the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project.

"I can help you plenty!" announced the presence which Tom's Guardian Angel had described as a "D.H." "You'd like to have this woman, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," Tom confessed, warily. "As soon as I recover, I'm going to . . . ."

"You're out of your body now—why go back? Much simpler to bring her over here to you!"

Tom eyed this dark reflection of himself.

"How can I do that?"

"Just sit tight and let things keep on the way they're going! It won't be long before the new war will blast her off the Earth. Then you can pick up your romance right here."

Tom shivered at the suggestion.

"There's nothing romantic about where I am now."

"There will be—when you're both dead and completely freed of your physical bodies," said the man in black. "You'll have a wonderful home and everything you want for your own enjoyment. Just forget the world and think of yourself for a change. That's all you have to do!"

Tom considered this proposal. He had given little thought to himself for years —to his personal desires or life, even though he realized now that the one woman in the world for him had been near him all this time.

The taxi was pulling up to the curb and Clare was fumbling in her pocketbook for money to pay the driver.

Forgetting himself, Tom placed a hand on her arm.

"Here—don't you pay! I'll get this!" he reached for a trouser pocket.

Clare, giving no heed to his words or actions, paid the sum registered on the meter, added a tip, and stepped from the cab. Tom followed her, with the man in black by his side.

"Here!" he protested. "You should have let *me* . . . .!"

But Clare hurried into her apartment house, totally disregarding him. Tom stood, looking after her, then glanced startledly at the man in black who was grinning at him.

"You still here?"

"Sure am! How about it? Say the word and I'll help get things lined up for you. She'll be joining you in no time!"

"And millions of people will be dying with her!" said the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project. "That's what I've been working night and day, for years, to try to avert!"

"Sure, but it's gotten beyond you now —it's beyond everyone. Might as well let the world go hang. There can't ever be

universal brotherhood . . . humans have been asking for self-destruction and they're going to get it. Why go back and try to fight it? You've done everything you humanly could already."

TOM hesitated. "No, I'm not sure of that. If I was back here on earth right now—I'd have a chance to influence the Military Board . . . as it is, Secretary Engle is apt to decide not to risk further negotiations with Russia . . . ."

"That's what he will decide. You couldn't get back in time to prevent it."

"Then why is Clare trying to reach me? Why is she pulling for me to live? *She* must think I can accomplish something! Oh, no—you don't tempt me to give up now when I'm needed most!"

The figure in black was not easily turned aside.

"It's kill or be killed on Earth and you're better off out of it. Clare will be, too! Everyone has to die some time . . . ."

"But not this way—not if life means anything . . . not if . . . .!"

"You didn't believe in life after death before you came here, did you?" persisted Tom's Lower Self. "But now you know that life goes on, why try to stop it? Why worry about what happens on Earth—how many die?"

"Because," Tom replied, with growing conviction, "I'm convinced now that we've been put on Earth for a purpose—for some kind of preparation and development. This must be so or we wouldn't survive death. And, this being true, then the greatest of all crimes is destroying life—sending humans on before their time!"

"Who knows when it's anyone's time to go?" mocked the man in black. "Are you turning religious at this late date?"

Tom eyed this unpleasant reflection of himself.

"No—but I can't dodge the apparent facts. There appears to be an eternal battle going on in the Universe between constructive and destructive forces—between higher and lower elements—in all life and all things. And you're the part of me that I don't like—the part I'm going to fight!"

"Okay!" accepted the man in black. "That's how you feel now—but you can't get along without me. I've been with you all your life and I'm the best friend you ever had!"

So saying the Lower Self of Tom Finley disappeared and, almost instantly, the white presence of the Guardian Angel was at hand.

"How'd you get along while I was gone?" he smiled.

"Not so good," said Tom. "I'm glad you're back."

"I warned you that you needed protection," reminded his Guardian Angel. "Maybe you'll believe me after this."

Tom nodded, soberly. "That other guy is mighty hard to shake. He bobs up every time you leave."

"And he always will," said the G.A. "That's what you have to watch out for."

"He wanted me to give up my work on Earth, stay here and let the atomic war come. Said it couldn't be prevented, anyway," reported Tom.

"That's the way most humans feel on earth," said the man in white. "They're seething with hatred, unrest and distrust of one another. Ready to end it all in war. It won't be easy to go back into life there and face this situation. Your D.H. was right about that."

Tom studied his Guardian Angel, amazed.

"Then you're advising that I . . . ?" he started.

"I'm not advising. I'm just stating

facts. The decision is entirely up to you."

Tom's reaction was instantaneous. "I've made my decision and I'm sticking to it," he replied. "As soon as my physical body's in shape, I'm going back!"

A highly pleased expression lighted the features of the man in white.

"With that attitude, you've every chance of making it," he said. Then, taking the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project by the arm, he announced: "Now that you've been tried and tested as to your real feelings about conditions on Earth, I have some exciting news for you."

Tom regarded his G.A. eagerly.

"You mean—I can go back now?" he asked.

"No," said the man in white, smiling. "I mean—I've just received a clearance to take you on through this Astral Plane into First Paradise for a visit!"

Tom stared at his Guardian Angel, incredulously.

"You don't mean ....?"

"You're going to what you call 'Heaven'," affirmed the man in white. "This is a privilege granted to few souls that are still not freed from the physical body."

"But why should *I* be favored?" demanded Tom.

"Because," said his G.A. frankly, "the powers in Heaven want your help to prevent catastrophe on Earth!"

Tom shook his head. "You're kidding," he said, unbelievingly.

"Take my hand," invited his Guardian Angel. "Make your mind receptive—and I'll show you how much I'm kidding!"

Tom did as directed, wonderingly.

"Now," said the man in white, "get set for the greatest journey you ever made! You're taking off—next stop—*Heaven!*"

CHAPTER V

CLARE LOGAN had an urgent telephone call late that afternoon. The persuasive man's voice said: "I know it's short notice but can you have dinner with me tonight?"

"Who is this speaking?" she asked.

"Bill Engle," said the voice. "I thought you'd recognize me."

"Oh—I'm sorry. I've not heard your voice too many times, Mr. Engle."

"Serves me right," chuckled the Secretary of Defense. "I've been told I had the type of voice no one ever forgot. But I see it's made little impression on you."

"It's doubtless my fault," said Clare. "I'm an awfully poor hand at guessing 'who's who' over a telephone wire. You could be somebody else and I wouldn't know the difference."

"Well, I'm not anybody else!" declared the head of the Military Cabinet, "and I'm calling in an hour to prove it—and take you to dinner!"

Clare caught her breath. "I'm not aware that I've accepted your invitation," she fenced.

"Seriously," said the Secretary of Defense, "I want to combine a little business with much pleasure, by asking for your company. We've had a busy day of investigation and I'm anxious to check a few details with you."

"In that case," Clare acquiesced, "I'll be ready—in an hour."

She hung up and turned to her mother, a practical, understanding woman. "I'm dining with the Secretary of Defense," she announced.

Mrs. Logan smiled, wisely. "Sounds to me," she said, "Like *you're* the one who's going to have to be on the *defense!*"

* * *

The head of the Military Board was a big man, physically and mentally. His

manner was dominating; his personality, charming; his appearance, striking. There was a streak of premature white running through the center of his dark brown hair, commencing at the forehead line. He explained it by saying he had once been struck by lightning but those who knew him best said the white hair appeared next morning following a bombing mission over Berlin in World War II when his B-29 had been shot down, barely gliding into friendly territory with everyone dead or dying aboard but Pilot Engle. He, himself, was badly wounded, owing his survival to indomitable will and great physique.

It was such a man who was now serving his country in time of its most serious crisis. On the personal side there was one debit charged against him—a divorce. But Bill Engle loved the ladies and had a way with them. To this, his former wife had objected. That, and the fact that he was seldom home in his governmental capacities. And so, while fighting to preserve peace in the world, he had failed to achieve harmony on his domestic front. But Bill Engle had taken the break-up of his marriage in stride as he had everything else. No time to lament the past, only time to prepare, if possible, for the future!

Despite herself, Clare found the Secretary of Defense fascinating. He had taken her to the Los Alamos Inn where a table for two had been reserved in a secluded booth. A steak dinner was waiting, ordered in advance so they wouldn't have to "take time out from their conversation" to select food and drink. From the moment they sat down, Bill Engle concentrated his full attention upon her.

"It's unfortunate," he said, "that this tragic happening had to occur to bring us together. But fate often deals out strange hands. I confess, Miss Logan, I felt strongly drawn to you at our questioning this morning."

His gaze was direct and meaningful. She dropped her eyes and decided it best not to reply. He knew better than to follow up at this point and veered away by asking: "How do you feel now, after your ordeal of last night?"

"Rather shaky," she admitted, frankly. "I've been terribly concerned, too, over Mr. Finley's condition. Working with him all these years, I naturally. . . ."

"Yes, of course," said the Secretary of Defense, helpfully. "I've been upset about Tom, myself. Great loss if he should go. I doubt if there is a scientist his equal in the atomic field."

"Not one!" she said, quickly and positively.

BILL ENGLE eyed her curiously. "You should know," he accepted, "you've met most of them at one time or another." Then, pointedly: "Which brings me to one of the questions I want to ask you. Did Tom, on any occasion, discuss his latest atomic developments with you?"

Clare drew in her breath, held it a moment, and then said, slowly; "Yes, he did."

"Good! . . . Then let me ask you this. Do you think you remember enough of what he told you to take charge and carry on the production of this new atomic bomb he had started?"

Clare drew back. The luscious piece of steak lost its taste in her mouth.

"No—no, I couldn't!"

"Don't let me throw you," soothed the Secretary of Defense. "Think it over. Tom's records being stolen—we're not too sure of certain procedures. You, with your background, and your close association with Tom, are the logical one to step in."

"You don't want a woman in this as-

signment," protested Clare. "Women are all right as researchers but when it comes to supervising a project ....!"

"You have the respect of the entire department," assured the head of the Military Board. "We've got to rush production of this new atomic bomb now or Russia will have it perfected and ready to use first. Its manufacture has been much simplified, as you know. Miss Logan, I'm afraid you're elected to take over!"

Clare sat, unspeaking, weighing what amounted to a governmental command.

"I've been praying all day for Mr. Finley to recover," she said, finally. "I can't follow in his footsteps. The responsibility is enormous. One wrong move can lead to happenings I wouldn't want to try to imagine!"

Bill Engle nodded. "I've heard that from several other scientists today," he admitted, "but we can't stop our work because of that. It's a case now of blow up or be blown . . . and I'd rather be on the sending than the receiving end."

"So would I," Clare conceded, "but it's still too horrific to contemplate."

The Secretary of Defense sat studying the woman across the table from him. She was dressed in a blue silk print dress, with contrasting short red cape, her blue eyes, now troubled, regarding him seriously.

"You'll have to pardon me, Miss Logan," Bill Engle said, abruptly. "But I've got to say it. How in the world did a girl as beautiful and feminine as you are get mixed up in physics and biology and atomic research? What kept you from Broadway or Hollywood—and, if I may be so personal—romance and matrimony?"

Clare's face colored. "To answer the first part of your question," she laughed, softly, "I've never considered myself beautiful. For the rest, must a woman in this world be only ornamental or can she, if she chooses, pursue a career and make something useful of her life?"

"You're hedging!" accused the Secretary of Defense. "There's not an attractive, full-blooded woman living who wouldn't ditch a career over night for the right man!"

Clare met his searching gaze head-on. "Then, let us say, perhaps," she rejoined, "that the right man hasn't come along!"

"I don't like that word 'perhaps' which you so deftly tucked away in that reply," said Bill Engle. "But you intrigue me immensely and I want to get better acquainted with you at the earliest possible date."

CLARE smiled as she toyed with her salad. "You are quite flattering, Mr. Secretary, but my work is really very demanding. I have little time for outside interests."

She had unwittingly given him an opening and he took it.

"Careful, Miss Logan or your own testimony earlier today may convict you. Didn't you say that you and Tom Finley had been practicing telepathy together?"

"Oh, well," said Clare, in some confusion. "That hasn't taken too much time—and that's been in line with our scientific interest."

The head of the Military Board was amused at her sudden betrayal of embarrassment.

"I see—quite a radical departure, I would say, from atomic subjects—unless you are operating on the theory that thoughts are transmitted by atomic energy?"

"You can laugh!" retorted Clare with a show of feeling, "but I'm convinced mind is able to communicate with mind. Dr. Rhine has proved it in his experi-

ments at Duke—and so has Dr. Murphy at New York University—and other investigators. It's just a matter of time when . . . . !"

"I know—when we'll do away with telephones and radio," finished Bill Engle. "Well, I'*m* transmitting a thought to you right now and I'm wondering if you're getting it?"

Clare sat back and pushed her dinner dishes away from her.

"I'm getting it," she said, "and I don't like it."

"Can't I tell you that I think you're wonderful?" Bill Engel persisted.

"I'm tired tonight," evaded Clare. "If you are through talking business, I'd like to go home."

Her attentive companion became instantly contrite.

"I'm sorry, Miss Logan. Forgive me if I've seemed too personal. I'm flying in to Washington tonight to report to the President. The other members of the Board are remaining here. I'm then rejoining them day after tomorrow and we're going to decide our course of action in the face of this development. I had hoped I could leave here, knowing that you were in charge of Mr. Finley's special atomic work. Have you given me a definite refusal?"

Clare Logan's blue eyes took on a coldly impersonal inquiring look.

"May I ask you a frank question, Mr. Secretary?"

"Why, certainly!"

"Are you making a play for me in requesting that I take over this work or do you really think . . . . !"

"Miss Logan!" broke in the Secretary of Defense, "I wouldn't be worth a damn as a public servant if I let my emotions rule my mind in decisions of this importance. It's the consensus of opinion among those who know that you're in line for this assignment. That's the sole basis of my request . . . but, wholly aside from that, as a man, can I be blamed for responding to a woman who appeals to me, at the same time?"

Clare laughed. "Well, at least we understand each other now . . . and, under those conditions, I'll do what I can at the Laboratory in Mr. Finley's absence."

Bill Engle reached across and pressed her hand. "Good girl!" he said. "I hope Tom recovers. We're flying the best brain specialists in the country in here tomorrow for a consultation. If his life can be saved, they'll do it!"

Sudden tears came to Clare's eyes. "That's the best news I've had all day," she said. "I know now that I'm going to sleep better tonight."

CHAPTER VI

HOW long a journey it was to Heaven. Tom Finley couldn't say. He had not been conscious enroute.

When he recovered his senses, he found himself standing outside an enormous building, looking not unlike a mammoth Sports Arena. He was still holding the hand of his Guardian Angel who regarded him, smilingly.

"Well, we made it!" he announced. "Pretty difficult getting out of that heavy astral atmosphere. Had to be careful, too, not to break your magnetic connection with your physical body. They had to beam some extra power to you from the central power plant here to enable you to make the trip."

"I feel okay!" announced Tom. "Never better, in fact!"

He looked around him. The stupendous structure seemed to extend for blocks in both directions. It was a light, luminous gold in color, and had many entrances with long lines of men and women and boys and girls of all ages, nationalities and color standing before

them.

"What's this?" asked Tom. "A football game? What's going on in here?"

His G.A. laughed. "This is the Receiving Station from Earth. All these people you see are new souls, just arriving. Their bodies have died on Earth and they're being checked in. It will take a little time because their life records have to be gone over and then they have to be assigned to their proper place."

"What do you mean 'proper place'?" demanded Tom.

"Well, some of them are ticketed for hell and they won't stay long here. Others are on the doubtful list. They'll be able to live on the outskirts of Heaven till they can have a fair chance of making the grade. The rest will take up residence here and start in on work that's waiting for them, in line with their developed abilities—except for a very few highly developed souls who will be passed on through to higher states of Paradise."

Tom exclaimed: "What a system! This is something like the Draft on Earth—weeding out the fit from the unfit."

"Only difference is," said the man in white, "you can't buy your way out of this. You get just what you've earned through the kind of life you've lived on Earth."

"You mean, you've had to be a good church member?" asked Tom, with misgivings.

"Oh, no—there are many 'good church members' who don't rate highly here. It's what you really *are* that counts, regardless of religion. Every soul has an equal chance depending on his Free Will choice. You can go to Hell if you want to."

"Thanks very much," said Tom, drily. "But I'm not so inclined at the moment."

The man in white took Tom's arm. "Follow me," he directed, "None of these lines are for you.

"Where do *I* go?" asked the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, feeling suddenly very small and unimportant.

"Through the Gate marked, 'Earthbound Souls'," informed his G.A. "Not many come to Heaven this way. You wouldn't have gotten here, either, if you hadn't been a special case. When you're still tied to the body, you usually float around in the astral world between Heaven and Earth."

"I wouldn't like that," said Tom, "if what I've just experienced has been a sample."

"That's the way most souls feel," said the man in white. "And they try to get back, too—if not in their own bodies—in the body of someone else!"

Tom stared thoughtfully at his G.A.

"You mean—there are souls that are *earthbound,* as you call it, even after their bodies are dead?"

The man in white nodded. "Oh, yes—quite a few. You see—thought is power, either for good or evil. If an individual dies whose thoughts and desires are strongly fixed on Earth, who doesn't believe in a Hereafter, and whose soul development is extremely low, he's often in a confused mental state and it takes him quite a while to realize he's dead. He thinks he's in some sort of nightmare and even his Guardian Angel has a hard time convincing him and getting him to let go his hold on things earthly. When he finds he can't get back in his own body, then he may try to occupy the body of some weak-willed individual or some foolish man or woman who is playing around with an ouija board or a psychic circle. Sometimes, a low intelligence like this can make contact and

take possession of a living human's body and consciousness for awhile. Scientists have a name for it—they call it *obsession.*"

"That's one field of investigation I've never studied," confessed Tom.

THEY were approaching the Gate and were being scrutinized by a pleasant-appearing Guard, in a white suit, who looked extremely human.

"Your name is Thomas Everett Finley, I believe?" the Guard greeted.

"That's right," acknowledged Tom, surprised.

"Understand you left things in pretty bad shape on Earth?"

"Couldn't be much worse," Tom admitted, with a wondering side glance at his G.A.

"We're much concerned about that up here," said the Guard. "Let's see—your credentials . . . .?" The man in white handed him a card. "Oh, yes!" He made a mark on the card and then entered something on a large ledger beside him. "Everything's in order. Pass on through, please!"

Tom's Guardian Angel took back the card and placed it carefully in an inside pocket.

"My name's Henry P. Thacker," the Guard introduced. "I'll probably be seeing you again on the way out."

Tom looked at him. "You mean—you used to live on Earth, too?"

The Guard smiled. "Sure did! I was drowned in Lake Michigan, right near Chicago. I used to usher at the Stadium and Soldiers' Field.

Tom registered astonishment. "You don't say! Do you like it up here?"

"Swell!"

"Haven't ever wanted to go back to earth?"

"Not me, Brother. Oh, things aren't perfect here, either—but they tell us it gets better as you go along."

Tom entered the Gate of Heaven, side by side with his Guardian Angel, and found himself walking in a long tunnel-like area-way. It seemed endless.

"What's above us?" he asked.

"The Receiving Halls," informed his G.A. "Where the souls are assembled upon admittance and where they wait to be assigned following examination. You should have seen it after Hiroshima. It was terrible. They told me a hundred thousand bewildered Japanese were milling around, trying to figure out where they were and what this was all about!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project shuddered.

"Why did you have to mention that? You know very well I was in a plane over Hiroshima and saw those poor devils blown into Eternity."

"And you'll have to answer for your part in it, too," said his Guardian Angel.

"I had nothing to do with dropping the bomb!" Tom protested. "I only helped make it and was required to be there as an observer. As a matter of fact, I tried to prevent the bomb's being used on humans. I urged the government to put on a demonstration of the bomb's power off the coast of Japan but I was over-ruled."

"You don't need to tell me," reminded the man in white. "I'm more familiar with your every thought and deed than you are. That's been part of my business."

They were nearing the end of the extended corridor as evidenced by the increasing glow of light. Not a soul had been passed in this journey but now, as they came suddenly out of the corridor, Tom cried out in amazement.

Before him was a broad thoroughfare lined with the most beautiful trees.

Their leaves were vari-colored, giving a dazzling rainbow effect as far as the eye could see. The roads were filled with people, all happily going some place, laughing and talking. Each appeared in perfect health and stature. There were no vehicles of any kind and Tom noted that no sidewalks existed.

"What—no automobiles in Heaven?" he said.

His Guardian Angel shook his head, smiling. "No—and no gas rationing or tire trouble, either."

"But how do people really get around?"

"How have you been getting around?" the man in white asked, pointedly.

Tom grinned, perplexedly. "I've just taken your hand and something has happened. All I've had to do was shut my eyes and go along for the ride."

"No—you've had to be willing or to want to go to a certain place," corrected the G.A., "before even I could take you."

"Oh, I see," said Tom doubtfully.

THEY were strolling past one magnificent building after another—each a different color and built of some unfamiliar material which looked as though it were a form of plastic.

"This is marvelous—it all reminds me of the 'World of Tomorrow' Avenue at the World's Fair in New York some years ago. That seemed like 'another world' to me then . . . and I'm getting the same sensation now," reported Tom.

"This *is* another world," replied his Guardian Angel. "It's very real."

"But there's one thing that bothers me," observed the new arrival in Heaven.

"What's that?"

"Do all these people I'm passing, have Guardian Angels, too?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then why don't I see them?"

Tom's G.A. laughed. "No human ever sees the Guardian Angel of another soul. He can see his own—and his Devil's Helper, at times—but that's all."

"Can *you* see the other G.A.'s?" asked Tom.

"Easily! And I can communicate with anyone I like, too!" rejoined the man in white. "That's the way the Great One in First Paradise reaches whomever he wants on Earth—through his Guardian Angel. There's a communications system between G.A.'s so we can know what's going on in the minds of the people all over the world at the same time."

Tom held his spinning head. "This is too much for me. Where are you taking me now?"

"You have an appointment at the Administration Headquarters with the Great One and his Catastrophe Council," informed the man in white. "It's within walking distance so I thought you'd like to see the sights."

"Beautiful!" said Tom. "But even the atmosphere here—it's so free from dirt—and what's worse—rush and tension. Like everyone's on a holiday!"

The man in white smiled. "Don't let appearances fool you. Each of these people you see passing has definite duties and responsibilities. Their spirits are freer because they have no economic pressures and no longer have to worry about illness or death. They know their future is assured if they live up to the best that's in them."

"Nothing for nothing, in other words," said Tom.

"That's it exactly!" confirmed his G.A. "If humans on earth only realized they couldn't get away with anything—they'd change their whole attitude toward life."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Tom. "Humans know right now how terrible war is, yet they're doing very little to prevent another one. Seems to me it will take some Higher Power to keep

us from destroying ourselves."

The man in white took his arm and turned him off the busy thoroughfare, up a series of polished dark-colored steps, and into the entrance of a great building.

"Here we are," he announced. "You will soon be in the presence of the Ruler of First Paradise!"

CHAPTER VII

THE Catastrophe Council of eleven members was in session.

"Any moment now," the Great One was saying, "the soul of T. Everett Finley will arrive from Earth and join us in conference. It is a fortunate circumstance that he was injured in such a manner as to have temporarily freed his spirit, permitting the journey here. There is no one now living on the planet who could be so helpful to us, at this time, if he can be persuaded to cooperate."

"He should be perfectly willing and happy to do so," declared Council Member Pierre Loubet, "after the part he has personally played in bringing about this crisis!"

"But, even so, we cannot impose upon his Free Will," reminded the Great One. "He must volunteer for service once we acquaint him with the facts."

"How much assurance have we that his physical body will recover?" asked Henry Bracken.

"None at the moment," replied the Ruler of First Paradise. "This is something else which is completely out of our hands—and bound by the physical laws of his own being. If his earth body dies and he is compelled to remain here —he can be of little use to us."

"Precisely!" said England's former exchequer, Herbert Stanley Lawrence. "It seems to me that we are banking our hopes of averting an earthly cataclysm upon extremely insubstantial circumstances."

"True enough," acknowledged the Great One, "but we in First Paradise have no other choice. We can only work *with* those we can reach from Earth."

"It's all wrong!" criticized Henry Bracken, impulsively. "We should have the power to step in and stop man's foolishness. It's terrible to be sitting up here—with our hands tied!"

The Great One smiled.

"Would you have welcomed outside interference when you were on Earth?"

"Well,—maybe yes, maybe no," answered the former Brooklyn construction engineer.

"Of course you wouldn't!" said the Great One. "No self-respecting human wants someone else to do his thinking and acting for him. He may accept suggestion but not dictation."

"But if he doesn't accept suggestion and blows himself off the Earth—he comes up here and over-runs Heaven!" objected Wang Yui. "That isn't right, either. Something seems to be wrong with the Great Scheme of Things!"

"The whole trouble," explained Savel Bose, Indian member of the Council, "is due to the fact that Man wasn't supposed to have invented the atomic bomb until he had become less war-like!"

"That being the case!" protested Henry Bracken, "why are we about to confer with the man most responsible for invention of the atomic bomb. He should be in hell, not here!"

The Great One raised his hand for silence.

"The soul about whom you speak has arrived!" he announced. "It is not for us to pass judgment upon him. He represents one of the great forces on Earth at present and we must work through him, if at all possible!"

The door to the Council Hall swung open and T. Everett Finley stood looking in. He was awed in the presence of this assemblage of his peers, particularly when all rose to greet him, bowing from their positions at the conference table.

"Go on in!" urged the man in white.

"Aren't you coming with me?"

"Not here! I'll wait outside. You're on your own!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project backed away, panic-stricken.

"What do you mean—I'm on my own?"

"They want to see *you*—not me!"

"But I'll be lost without you!"

"You won't lose me if you hold the right mental attitude."

Tom glanced inside at the imposing appearing room and the even more imposing looking Council Members.

"I'm not sure what attitude I can hold in there. If I'd known I had to face this alone . . . !"

"You have to face every great issue alone," said his Guardian Angel. "I can't spare you from that. I couldn't on Earth—and I'm not permitted here."

Still Tom hesitated. "Do those birds in there know all about me?"

"Of course. They have access to your life record."

"Oh, no! . . . I wish I hadn't come!"

Tom tried to close the door but the man in white blocked him.

"What's the matter with you—getting cold feet, when you're about to be given a chance to undo much that you've done on Earth?"

TOM, unanswering, turned in another direction, seeking escape, and encountered the man in black.

"Hello!" greeted his D.H. "Looking for me? . . . It's about time! Those guys in there are going to put you on the spot. You don't want to get mixed up in what's getting ready to happen on Earth. Come on with me—I'll get you out of this!"

"Where will you take me?" asked Tom.

"You'll see when you get there!" smiled the man in black. "It's a better place than here! Grab my hand and let's go!"

But Tom was not that easily persuaded. Feeling torn between the two, he glanced once more inside the Council Hall. The Council Members were just seating themselves, eyeing him, wonderingly. The Being at the head of the table beckoned. Tom felt a strong pull toward him.

"Okay!" he said, surprised at his own decision, "I'm coming!"

The man in black reached out hands to restrain him but the man in white stepped between.

"He's made up his mind," said Tom's G. A. "You can't change it!"

The man in black faded from sight as Tom, taking a deep breath, marched into the Council Hall and faced the assembled group.

"I understand you sent for me?" he inquired.

"Yes," smiled the presiding presence. "Be seated, please, Mr. Finley. Your time may be short with us and we have much ground to cover!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project sank into a chair near the head of the table. He was fascinated by the unusual form and appearance of the Being who had greeted him. The majesty and bearing of this Personality established him at once, without any fanfare, as someone above and beyond the stature of Man. The other members of the group seated about the table, aside from their obviously different racial features, looked human, like himself. The Presence also had human char-

acteristics but of a vastly more refined nature. And he was robed in white while his councilors wore the clothes which might have been expected of them in the lands they had formerly lived on earth.

"You are meeting with the Catastrophe Council of First Paradise," the presiding presence continued, after giving Tom a moment to adjust himself. "We are greatly concerned, Mr. Finley, over conditions on earth."

"So am I!" Tom replied, impulsively. Then, as an after thought, "But why should you be up here?"

"Because," was the quiet but electrifying answer, "We are not ready to receive and care for a hundred million souls who may arrive in the first few minutes of atomic warfare!"

The impact of this statement left The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project shocked and stunned.

"I'd never thought of the possible complications after death," he confessed. "It's been a frightful nightmare for me to contemplate possible atomic destruction of life and property but I presumed this only affected conditions on Earth."

"And now you can see that everything that happens reacts on everything else," pointed out the head of the Catastrophe Council. "You've observed how a stone, dropped in a quiet pool of water, sends wave-like circles out across the pond. The bigger the stone, the wider the circles. Such a calamitous happening as is about to occur on Earth would set up reverberations which would be felt in the furthermost reaches of Paradise. This event must not take place if it can humanly be prevented!"

Tom eyed the members of the Catas-



trophe Council soberly.

"I doubt if it *can* be *humanly* prevented," he declared. "Things have gone too far. The Russians' theft of our latest atomic secrets will be the final, culminating incident. If war is prevented, it will be up to you in Heaven to do it!"

The Grand Ruler of First Paradise lifted his hands and let them drop helplessly at his sides.

"We, here, are powerless, in and of ourselves," he announced. Then, by way of explanation, as Tom eyed him, increduously. "You see, no higher power



The white-robed presiding Presence of the Catastrophe Council of First Paradise beckoned to Tom Finley as he strode into the council chamber

is permitted to interfere with Man's Will. We can work through Man, if he calls on us or attunes his will to ours—but we cannot compel him. For this reason, we are entirely dependent now on a few humans, like yourself, who might still be able to exert the influence necessary to avert the most colossal disaster in the history of your planet!"

TOM shook his head overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation. "But what can *I* do?" he asked, finally, feeling the eyes of all upon him.

"That's for you to decide," said the presiding presence. "We are doing everything possible in Heaven to meet this emergency if it comes to pass but we've brought you here to show you, at first hand, that we're not equipped to accomodate such a tremendous influx of souls. Under the circumstances, we would lose many to the nether regions."

"Nether regions?" repeated Tom, puzzled.

"Hell, to you!" translated Henry Bracken. "You see, we have training schools up here and a regular program of development and reaction. We can handle any reasonable number from Earth who might arrive as a result of any fairly large explosion or fire or earthquake or epidemic—but the Boss is trying to make clear that there isn't room in First Paradise for the humans your atomic bombs are going to kill off!"

Tom nodded, placing a hand to his head which was throbbing as much as the head he had had on Earth.

"You're as much responsible as anyone for what's about to happen!" accused Pierre Loubet. "If you hadn't invented the atomic bomb . . .!"

"I was only one in over five thousand scientists and research workers who developed it!" Tom protested.

"But you were in charge—you're the most responsible!" followed up the Frenchman. "I lost my life in the first World War. A soldier had a chance then. He won't have any now!"

"Either with or without the atomic bomb!" defended Tom. "Poison gas and bacteriological and supersonic sound wave warfare have also been developed to the point of annihilation! So don't be blaming me too much for my atomic work."

"Your new atomic bomb," said Wang Yui, "according to reports reaching us over our Guardian Angels Communication System, is so powerful that a dozen, strategically placed, and exploded, could destroy all life on the planet. Is that true?"

Tom wet his lips, nervously.

"If my calculations are correct, yes," he answered.

"Then we should not be too concerned about other weapons of destruction," said the Chinese member of the Council. "You cannot hide behind them, Mr. Finley, as an excuse for developing this monstrous means of killing your fellow humans."

"But—but you men have lived on Earth at different times," appealed Tom. "If my country, the United States, had not developed these atomic bombs for her protection, some enemy country such as Germany, Japan or Russia would have done it. We were compelled to do it for our own salvation. I had to keep on, with my associates at Los Alamos, perfecting our atomic weapons, so we could stay ahead of all other nations. You probably know, there's been a terrific armament race on. We had hoped to keep so strong that the mere threat of force from us could keep the world at peace!"

The Grand Ruler of First Paradise shook his head, sadly.

"I have scanned too many ages since

the beginning of human life on your planet," he said. "Fear of force has kept Man from war but has not ultimately prevented war. Fear of starvation and poverty, and desire for freedom from slavery has made Man dare anything. This will be true today as it has been before. But if war can be prevented this time—Man may finally realize the necessity of overcoming other Earth ills and thus eliminate the cause of conflicts."

"That's been my hope!" said Tom, "That the threat of force could keep the world from war long enough to . . . !"

"Are you sure that's your conviction?" broke in Great Britain's member of the Council. "Or are you just making this statement before this body for your own . . .?"

"Examine my life record!" challenged Tom. "I've spoken out against war at every opportunity."

"So did the first ammunition makers!" cried Savel Bose, his dark eyes flashing. "So do all the big armament manufacturers today. It's a part of their propaganda . . . while they secretly are promoting war because it means vast profits . . . !"

TOM laughed. "My salary as an atomic scientist should convince you that I'm not in this work for profit. Nor are the other people on my staff. Dr. Anapol, it now appears, was in the work as a Russian agent, to steal our secrets and make them available to his country. No, gentlemen, if you are trying to discern my motives, you will find no evidence which points to graft or greed. I've been interested only in saving humanity through developing bombs so powerful that war is unthinkable."

"War is never unthinkable to those who have little imagination," replied the Grand Ruler of First Paradise. "Those who make wars always gamble that they, somehow, will wreak destruction on others and escape destruction themselves. That's the great danger which exists now on your planet. Those who guide the destinies of the United States are right this moment in conference, weighing the question as to whether or not Russia should be attacked, without warning, and at once!"

Tom stood up. "You can see this?" he demanded.

"I am being advised by Guardian Angels in attendance," reported the presiding presence. "You might also be interested to know that Dr. Anapol, your former associate, is now on the last lap of his plane trip to Moscow. He was pursued by your country's fastest pursuit planes but they had to give up the chase over Russian controlled territory. Inside another five hours, Dr. Anapol will have landed with the atomic secrets. He is delivering them direct to Russian's Board of Military Strategy, headed by the Premier."

"And this means," cried Tom, excitedly, "that our government will most certainly decide to attack. I know the mind of our Secretary of Defense. He's been advocating atomic warfare against Russia the instant our more powerful bombs were produced. He won't wait now! If I was only back on earth . . . if I could do something to get him to delay! . . . If I could reach Androv in Russia . . . !"

"You can!" prompted the Grand Ruler of First Paradise.

"I can!" said the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, wonderingly. "How?"

"As long as you remain in your astral body, you can travel where you choose on earth, in company of your Guardian Angel!"

"You mean!" Tom gasped, "that I could go to Washington—or Russia—if I

wanted—and see and talk to these men?"

"You could try!" said the head of the Catastrophe Council, as all members nodded approvingly in reply to Tom's query. "It's seldom that a soul in the astral plane can reach the mind of an individual on earth, in recognizable form—but one with your intensity of purpose might accomplish it. If you could—you might so impress these men that they would delay action."

"I'll reach them if anyone can," Tom promised. "Is there anything else I need to know?"

"Nothing," smiled the Grand Ruler of First Paradise, rising and extending his hand, "except that all Heaven is depending on you. If you fail, untold millions will suffer priceless loss of soul developing opportunities on Earth . . . and we here will be hopelessly swamped for Earth years to come. The resultant chaos would give the Nether Region the greatest chance in all time to recruit inhabitants!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project turned and strode to the door, then swung about as another thought occurred to him.

"I could do even more once I can get back in my body!" he said.

"Your physical recovery is still in doubt," informed the Being called the Great One. "You may not get a chance to regain consciousness on Earth. If you die, you will pass through the astral plane and take up residence here where you will be too far removed to directly influence humans in the flesh. Therefore, make the most of your time and unique position now—while you can!"

"Very well!" agreed Tom. "Can I communicate with you in any way?"

"Only through your Guardian Angel," said the Grand Ruler of First Paradise. "But we will be following you and aiding in every way possible—ways you cannot sense! Goodbye until you return to stay! And—may the forces of Good be with you!"

"FORCES of Good?" Tom repeated, as he left the Council Hall and closed the door behind him. "Why should he have said that? Does he mean that forces of Evil might . . .?"

There appeared before him—the man in black!

"You were thinking of me?" he said.

"No!" denied Tom. "Go away! I've got a job to do!"

"Not till after your date with me!"

"I have no date with you!"

"Oh, yes you have! You've seen the Big Shot of Heaven—now you're going to see the Big Shot of Hell!"

"How did you know I was curious about him?"

"Curious? . . . You've got a little of the Devil in you, that's why! . . . Everyone has!"

Tom looked debatingly at the man in black.

"I suppose, in a way, that's true. You don't seem to be so bad, now that I'm getting to know you."

"*Bad?* . . ." his D. H. rejoined. "I've given you some of the best times of your life. This good and bad business is the bunk—just a matter of geography!"

Tom considered this statement, thoughtfully.

"There's some point to that. What's right and what's wrong is largely man-made law. It's a crime to kill a person in private life but not in war . . ."

"That's it!" said Tom's D. H. helpfully. "And that's what's been worrying you—those hundred thousand Japs killed at Hiroshima—your conscience—You're worrying now that you may not be able to stop a hundred million more humans from being killed. Cut it out! Is Earth such a happy place? Isn't it full of

strife, bloodshed, race hatreds, starvation, poverty? You'll be one of the greatest benefactors of all time if you kill these poor people off and send them on to the next life!"

"But there's no room for them in Heaven!" protested Tom.

His Devil's Helper let out a shriek of laughter.

"No room! . . . Ha! Ha! . . . There's room in *Hell!* . . . We're prepared to take care of any number, any time! . . . And what accommodations! You think Heaven is something! Take my hand. We're going on a trip!"

"Can't do it," said Tom, "I've got a trip to make. I'm going back to earth and . . .!"

"This won't take long," insisted his D. H. "I'll show you things you never thought possible. Besides, my Boss wants to meet you!"

"But my G. A. should be here somewhere," said Tom.

The man in white quite suddenly appeared.

"Oh, here you are! I've been talking to my D. H. He says that he wants me to . . . !"

"Better make up your mind," said his Guardian Angel. "You can't go with us both!"

"Would you mind waiting a few minutes?" asked Tom. "While I'm here I'd really like to look in on Hell. He says it's not such a bad place . . .!"

"It doesn't seem so until you're in it," said the man in white. "It's up to you, Tom. I've told you—you can go to hell if you want to . . .!"

The man in black beckoned enticingly. Tom reached out and took his hand.

"I won't be gone long," he said.

"That's what they all say," rejoined his Guardian Angel, as he faded from view.

CHAPTER VIII

THOMAS EVERETT FINLEY felt a sinking sensation. He was going down, down, down through space, as though falling through an elevator shaft. It was dark and the descent terrifyingly rapid!

"Help!" Tom cried out. "G. A.! . . . Help!"

A mocking laugh answered. "Getting a thrill? . . . Your G. A. can't help you! . . . He can't even come where you're going! . . . Don't worry! *I'm* with you!"

Tom's hand was given a hard squeeze and he realized now that he was still in the grip of his D. H.

"How far down *is* Hell?" he asked.

"How far is Good from Evil?" was the taunting reply. "Relax, Tom, old boy—you'll soon be there!"

A reddish light suddenly glowed below and their acceleration of descent greatly lessened. They came lightly to rest, in a standing position, on what had the appearance of a polished black marble floor in a great room. Everything about them was black—walls, ceiling, draperies, furniture—illuminated by the reddish glare.

It was eerie and the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project didn't like it.

"Where am I?", he asked.

"You are in the palace of His Satanic Majesty!" said his Devil's Helper. "We came direct, by official permission. You didn't have to check in through the gates of Hell. You're too well known here!"

"*Me*—well known?" exclaimed Tom, in astonishment.

The man in black beside him grinned and nodded.

"You sure are! You're close to the top of the honor roll in this Age."

"*What* honor roll?"

"Of those who have contributed most

to human misery and death!" said his D. H. "You have great possibilities in Hell!"

"I don't get this at all," said Tom.

"You will!" assured his D. H. "And you'll like it! You've earned a real reward in Hell and you're going to get it!"

There was a rumbling sound like a continuous peal of thunder and the wall in front of Tom suddenly rolled back. In front of him he now beheld a scene of Satanic splendor—a huge court, with black marble pillars reaching up into domeless darkness, in which floated red tinted clouds, catching their reflection from great blazing fire pots of ornate and fiendishly symbolic design, flanking each side of the enormous interior. At the far end of this room, seated on a magnificent solid ruby throne of flashing, ever changing reddish hue, was "the Boss of Hell," his Satanic Majesty, commonly known on Earth as "the Devil."

He was a huge figure, fully seven feet in stature, his great shoulders supporting a black cape, with red inner lining, which he wore over black evening clothes. His features were dark, heavy black eyebrows and hair, penetrating black eyes, black moustache and a sharply pointed black goatee. Rakishly adorning his head was a white satin turban in which had been centered a mammoth black opal which flashed shafts of dark colored light to different sectors of the Throne Room as he looked about. All in all, the "Boss of Hell" was a study in ominous Technicolor—enormously appealing in a theatrical sense—far eclipsing in appearance the Grand Ruler of First Paradise.

"Well, here we are!" announced Tom's Devil's Helper. "You're in the presence now of the greatest Being in Hell."

Tom had no words to describe his reaction to this spectacle. As his eyes became accustomed to the strange reddish light, he saw that there were others in the great room with him, and he was conscious now of soft, sensuous, alluring music. Feminine forms were weaving back and forth in a sinuous, insinuating, intoxicating dance. They were almost entirely nude but for the thinnest of black veils, which wound and unwound about their graceful bodies as they swirled and pirouetted around and around.

"Beats any nightclub you ever saw, doesn't it?" prodded the man in black. "When the Boss is holding court, there's always something going on like this. He likes entertainment. That's what hell is—one hell of a good time!"

Despite himself, Tom felt drawn to the warmth and color and sensuous charm of the atmosphere. He wanted to see more.

"You like it!" divined his D.H. "I knew you would—but, as Al Jolson used to say on earth, 'you ain't seen nothin' yet!' "

THE MUSIC concluded in a fanfare and the dancers parted ranks, forming an inviting lane from the point where Tom was standing to the Throne itself.

"Thomas Everett Finley," boomed a voice. "Welcome to Hell! Advance and meet his Majesty, Ruler of all Satanic Hosts, who waits to greet you!"

There followed a roll of drums as Tom's Devil's Helper took him by the arm.

"You are being *given the works!*" he informed. "Few ever meet the Devil in person. This ceremony is all for your benefit—in your honor!" So saying, the Devil's Helper mysteriously disappeared.

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project found himself marching to the beat of the drums, straight toward

the Throne. Feminine hands and arms reached out to touch or encircle him as he passed, and several bewitching sirens sought to kiss him. It was the triumphal march of a returning gladiator, only, Thomas Everett Finley was embarrassed by it.

Coming to a halt before the throne, he looked up into the smiling countenance of the great figure above him.

"Well, Finley," greeted the Devil, "I appreciate your dropping in. I've been following your work on Earth with great admiration and interest. Come up here and sit down." He gestured to a chair next the Throne.

Tom mounted the black glossy steps and took the seat offered. He glanced about him, nervously, from this elevated position and noticed that the dancing girls had vanished. Soft music still was playing but he and the Devil were—*alone!*

"It's not often that we are honored by the visitation of such a notable before his death," said His Satanic Majesty. "But we've prepared a place for you when your time to leave Earth finally arrives. You don't need to worry about any housing shortage down here!" His voice broke into an enormous good-natured chuckle. "I understand they're having a Hell of a time in Heaven?"

Tom had not anticipated this manifestation of a sense of humor. It was so contagious that his own tension relaxed in a smile.

"They certainly are!" he affirmed.

"And you're largely the cause of it," exulted the Devil. "You and your atomic bomb!"

"I'm sorry for that," said Tom. "I developed this bomb for our own defense—to prevent war—not to start a new one."

"I know," chuckled the personification of Evil. "That's the way all new weapons are invented—for defense. But they are like new toys—Man just isn't satisfied until he's tried them out!"

"You're right," Tom admitted. "That's what concerns me—and that's what I'm going back to Earth to try to forestall."

His Satanic Majesty shook his head and the black opal flashed.

"You're wasting your time," he said. "Now that you're here—you might as well stay. Of course, if your physical body recovers, you'll have to go back to Earth for awhile—but *this* is the place for you!"

"It looks very inviting," Tom confessed. "A little Hollywoodish, perhaps," he ventured. "But maybe it's what the rank and file of humans want."

"It *is!*" said the Devil. "Most humans like show and, of course, we give it to them. But they have to pay for it! Cause and effect, you know!"

"For instance?" inquired Tom.

"Well," said the Devil, with a gleam of fiendish relish in his eyes. "Lots of folks like to drink. They become alcoholics on Earth. When they get to Hell, they still have the appetite but they can't get the liquor. *Desire without gratification!* If you can think of a finer punishment than that—let me know. I've been working out systems of torment for millions of years!"

"What about these beautiful women I saw?" asked Tom. "Can a man make love to them?"

"Certainly," smiled the Devil. "Free license up to a point. But, again—*desire without gratification!*"

"This is hell all right," said Tom. "Is everything operated here on the same basis?"

The Devil laughed. "Precisely. That's what humans expect when they come to Hell—punishment. And they get it!"

"You apparently enjoy seeing them suffer!" observed Tom, suddenly aghast.

"Why not?" said the Devil. "That's

my business!" Then eyeing the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, he smiled and reached out a big hand to pat him reassuringly on the shoulder. "Oh, I see what's worrying you! . . . You think you're in for punishment, too! But not a bit of it. You've qualified as a member of my staff. You can go the limit in Hell — *have* anything you want — *do* anything you want — without any penalties!"

"What did I do on Earth to qualify?" asked Tom, testily.

"Why, your work on the atomic bomb, of course!" said the Devil. "In the next few years you'll do more to populate Hell than any other human who's ever lived. More than all the Caesars, Alexanders, Hannibals, Napoleons, Kaisers and Hitlers put together! You'll go down in history as the *greatest killer of all time!*"

Tom Finley sensed a violent feeling of nausea.

"I—I've got to be getting out of here!"

The Devil put out a restraining hand.

"You don't understand. When you come to Hell to live, I'll give you dominion over a new subdivision I'm opening up to take care of the millions your atomic bomb is going to bring here."

THE DIRECTOR of the Los Alamos Atomic Project leaped to his feet, in mounting horror.

"No, no—I don't want it!" he cried. "I don't want to see any people my bombs may kill!"

"They won't be dead," soothed His Satanic Majesty, "They'll just be minus their physical bodies. Burning up with physical desire without gratification. That's the fires of Hell — desire unrealized. But *your* desires will be cared for —all the things you enjoyed in the flesh and more—are yours."

Tom faced the Supreme Ruler of the Nether Regions who towered over him.

"You're lying!" he accused. "If I believed you and came here, I'd find myself in the same position as these wretched humans who are in slavery right now to the Spirit of Evil. You'd like to trick me into coming under your power. But I'm returning to Earth and doing everything I can to keep these millions of souls out of your clutches!"

The Devil's laugh boomed throughout the Throne Room.

"I'll get them anyway — in time!" he said. "The way they're living, they're headed straight for Hell."

"They won't be when I tell them what Hell is!" declared Tom. "They'll do anything to keep out of here—*anything!*"

"They'll do what they've always done!" predicted His Satanic Majesty. "They'll live for today! When they die, they won't be able to rise above their physical desires and they'll have to come here... and they'll be my captives — to do with as I please — to tempt and to torture!" The features of the Devil had now lost all handsome, appealing qualities. His face and eyes were distorted with a fiendish, lustful sadism. "If it's women you want," he said, "take your pick!"

Instantly the Throne was surrounded by voluptuous women, scantily clad, with Venus like forms, fauning for his attentions. To Tom's surprise, they all bore a remarkable resemblance to the girl he loved on Earth — Clare Logan. And each strongly appealed to him, because of this resemblance.

"No!" he cried. "I see it all now. These women don't really exist. They're just figments of my own imagination—my own desires. You're playing upon my emotions—my real love for Clare Logan. But this isn't real—this is just sham, pretense, deception!"

At Tom's denunciation, the feminine likenesses of Clare Logan vanished.

"You are extremely clever for a mortal, Mr. Finley," said the Devil. "Very few humans know the difference between the real and the unreal. There are millions here now who still think they're in their physical bodies. They can't understand why they can't ever realize their desires. So they keep on



His Satanic Majesty smiled. "You are an extremely clever mortal, Mr. Finley," he said

trying and failing, trying and failing. But you can't be fooled. I see I will have to share my secrets of higher sensual enjoyment with you!"

"I want no part of your operations here!" denounced Tom. "I only wish my atomic bombs had the power to blow you and Hell out of existence!"

A vast bellow of amusement roared from the Devil.

"You can't destroy Hell until you destroy every evil thought!" he proclaimed. "I came into existence with the first evil thought and act of Man—and I've been growing in power ever since. I'm the personification of all Evil. You can't get away from me because you've made yourself a part of me! So has everyone else who has come here—billions of them!"

Tom glanced about him, in growing terror, beset with but one idea — to escape. A door was opening behind the Throne. He made a sudden break and dashed through it. The explosive laughter of the Devil rocketed after him as his voice boomed out: "Ho! Ho! . . . That's the entrance to Hell! . . . Take a good look around! It may change your mind. My offer still stands!"

Tom whirled about but the door had closed behind him. He was in a semi-dark, high ceiling room, illumined by the same reddish glare. Fantastic black shadows swooped at him like gigantic bats and drove him, ducking and dodging, across to an area-way which led out into an apparent courtyard.

FAR ABOVE him was a sky — but a sky as he had never seen, criss-crossing with tongues of yellow flame against a red background. The sight gave him a feverish, oppressed, hemmed in feeling.

"G.A.!" he shouted, in sudden fright, perspiration pouring from his pores. "G.A.! Get me out of here!"

But the man in white did not appear. He remembered now. No Guardian Angel entered the gates of Hell. He was in this place on his own, with no protection but his self-developed soul qualities. If he was to get out, it would have to be "under his own power."

There was a street beside the courtyard and the Palace of His Satanic Majesty but no street lights. He couldn't tell whether it was night or day in Hell — or whether this was the ever-present illumination. Though he was outdoors, the atmosphere gave him the feeling that he was in a half-lighted tavern and now, as his eyes became more accustomed to the bizarre lighting he saw that there were guards parading on the street and that frightened appearing men and women were hurrying past, flashing furtive glances in his direction.

Tom examined himself, curiously. These people apparently detected a difference between him and themselves. He was struck with an urgent desire to manage a conversation with some of them, but would these guards permit it?

No way of telling unless he tried. He first had to get beyond the fence which enclosed the courtyard, and the powerful guard at the gate, dressed in black, with shining black boots and high standing red hat.

"It's all right, Mr. Finley!" the guard surprised him by calling. "I have orders to give you the run of Hell. You can go anywhere you like!"

"Thank you!" said Tom, slipping through the gate which was opened for him. "Thank you very much!"

He stepped quickly out of the guard's reach, almost fearful that the order would be rescinded and that he would be grabbed and put in confinement. As he did so, a long black limousine slid noiselessly up to the curb. At least it had the appearance of a car although

its motive power was not discernible. There was a chauffeur, dressed in bright red livery at the wheel. And, from the car stepped a presence resembling himself!

"Hi, Tom!" this presence addressed. "What's the matter? Don't you recognize me?"

Tom stared, then backed away. It was the man in black, his D.H. "Oh, no!" he cried. "Not *you!*"

"Get in!" invited the Devil's Helper. "You're in luck again! I've been permitted to take you on a sight-seeing tour of Hell. This is very special! You must have made a hit with His Majesty!"

Tom hesitated. He was trying to think things through. This was just too fantastic! Could it all be a dream? But, if it wasn't, shouldn't he try to see Hell while he had the opportunity. He wasn't yet dead. At least, he'd been told that he wasn't. And, if his physical body recovered on Earth, no power in Heaven or Hell could keep him from returning to it. Why, then, should he fear the Devil? Why should he fear any power, Good or Evil? For the time being, he was protected against harm—if his reasoning was correct!

"Okay!" he accepted, getting in the sleek appearing conveyance beside the man in black. "Take me through Hell!"

CHAPTER IX

THE limousine shot quietly away from the curb. Tom glanced at the Palace and grounds as they rapidly disappeared from view in the haze. He caught too, fleeting, a glimpse of an enormous building with a group statue on its dome of men and women in delirious revelry—drinking, dancing, sensuous love-making. It looked like a sculptured reproduction of a wild party on earth.

"Most unusual!" he remarked to the man in black. "Quite different from the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor . . . !"

His D.H. smiled.

"Most humans don't want Liberty," he said. "All they want is Free License. Give them that and they'll surrender everything else! That's why they come to Hell!"

They were traveling now through a congested area of apparent apartment houses, packed with humans. Tom noted the names of the streets as he passed—Desolation Avenue, Despair View, Lost Hope Street, Tragedy Lane, Suicide Alley, Lost Souls Harbor.

"How come these names?" he asked.

"Put there by the inhabitants," said the D.H. "Their idea of humor."

"I wonder?" said Tom, gravely.

There were many on the streets, some in evening dress, others in rags, a strange assortment of well-to-do and poverty-stricken souls, elaborately or disdainfully seeking to avoid each other, passing along to unknown destinations. Quite a few stopped to stare at the passing limousine and to bow in servitude to it.

"What's the idea of the respect they're paying to this car?" asked Tom.

"They recognize it as belonging to the fleet of His Satanic Majesty," informed his Devil's Helper. "They fear him as they fear themselves. They know he's the reflection of all Evil and that he has the power to intensify their desires and increase their suffering . . ."

Tom eyed the throngs with a growing feeling of great sympathy.

"Are they in his power forever?" he asked.

His Devil's Helper laughed.

"Most of them *think* they are," he replied, frankly. "But, actually, he can only control them as long as they persist

in their evil thoughts and desires. If they ever get wise to themselves and let go of these, they commence to rise out of their Lower Selves and this raises their vibration so that Hell no longer has any hold on them!"

"And then what?" demanded Tom, tensely.

"And then," added the man in black. "They slip out of Hell into First Paradise."

"Then there's still hope for many here?"

"Oh, yes — just so the good in them hasn't become extinct. Some are too far gone to pull out — you'll see some of these. Others want to get away but they're not quite strong enough. They're still struggling."

"Why should you be telling me these things?" asked Tom, warily.

His Devil's Helper laughed.

"If you're to be on His Majesty's staff, you've got to know how it is here," he replied.

"But I haven't accepted — I mean — I have no intention . . . !"

The man in black was unimpressed. "You can't very well help yourself. When atomic warfare comes and you have to assume your share of the responsibility for killing millions of humans —cutting short their chance for spiritual development . . . you don't think, by any chance, you'll land in Heaven, do you?"

Tom felt something inside his astral body tighten until it seemed it would strangle and suffocate him.

"But I've already explained—I didn't develop the bomb to kill—only to . . . !"

"There are sins of omission as well as commission," reminded his D.H. "You'll be held accountable regardless—based on what actually happens!"

"That's why I've got to get back to Earth before it's too late!" said Tom, in an agony of spirit.

His Devil's Helper seemed unaffected.

"I wouldn't be in too much of a hurry," he advised. "Your physical body has just had a sinking spell—they're giving you a blood transfusion. You may be dead any time—and then you'll be saved a trip back here!"

Tom eyed his D.H.

'You're trying to deceive me!" he charged. "If I die on Earth, I'll go first to Heaven, not Hell, and neither you nor the Devil, himself, can say for certain that I'll end up here!"

TOM'S attention was suddenly distracted by the sound of terrifying screams. He looked about him, startled. It seemed as though thousands of humans were crying out in mortal pain and terror.

"What's going on here?" he exclaimed.

"Dope and Alcoholic Section of Hades," explained his Devil's Helper. "They're all crying for dope and liquor but, of course, there isn't any. But they *think* there is and that the Devil is keeping it from them."

Tom put hands over his ears.

"I can't stand this!" he said.

"Wouldn't you like to see some of them?" asked the man in black. "They're quite something to look at!"

"No, no! . . . Drive out of here, please! Hurry!"

"This section extends for hundreds of miles," his D.H. continued, as the chauffeur obligingly made a left turn and drove away from the area.

"How can even the Devil stand seeing and hearing this misery?" asked Tom.

The man in black smiled.

"This is music to his ears! He knows, as long as he hears this that he has all these souls in his power."

"Let me get this straight," said Tom.

"Do these uncontrolled desires exist only in the *minds* of these souls?"

"That's all!" laughed the D.H. "Their bodies here are only a reflection of their desires. The only body that has any substance or reality is the spiritual—and when their desires are so low, it can't function. Not having physical bodies and their desires being so strong, they don't realize that what they are experiencing is only in their minds—and *that's what keeps them in Hell!*"

"Why doesn't someone get onto this, and tell them?"

"Did you ever try telling a drunk with the D.T.'s that he wasn't seeing what he thinks he's seeing?" replied the Devil's Helper. "They have to find out for themselves."

"And I'm going to find out for *myself!*" resolved Tom. "Stop the car by the next people you see. I want to talk to them!"

The man in black eyed Tom, debatingly.

"You're sure you want to do this?"

"Certainly! Here—there's a man—and a woman! Stop!"

The red liveried chauffeur swung the limousine in to the curb. Tom, hand on the door, leaped to the sidewalk.

"*You!*" he called to the man. "Just a moment, sir!" Then, blocking the woman's path, he said: "And you, Madam—I'd like to speak to you!"

The man was in evening dress, middle-aged, a semblance of culture, but bleary-eyed. The woman could have been in her late twenties . . . she had the street-walker air about her and, just now, a look of defiance and suspicion.

"What do you want?" she snapped, and darted a glance at the car.

The man, at being hailed, swung about and advanced toward Tom, inquiringly.

"Do I know you?" he asked, puzzled.

"No—neither of you know me," said Tom. "I . . .!"

The eyes of the blonde widened and she clutched at the arm of the man in evening dress.

"Look out for him!" she warned. "He's not one of us! He's not *dead* yet!"

"Not dead!" repeated Tom. "How can you tell?"

"It's the light in you!" said the woman. "We're dark inside. Can't you see—we're *dark!*"

Tom looked, Her figure seemed substantial but it *was* dark—no luminosity—no glow—no radiance—and now that she had called his attention to her—he realized how hopeless and wretched she looked.

"What are you doing here," demanded the man, putting a protecting arm around the woman. "Do you know where you are?"

"Yes, *I* do!" said Tom. "Do *you?*"

The man in evening dress appeared dazed. He put a trembling hand to his head.

"I'm on my way home from a party," he said. "I was hit by a cab but I'm all right, as you can see. I'm a bit turned around. . . ."

"He doesn't know he's dead yet," said the woman to Tom. But *I* do. . . . He's just going around and around like a merry-go-round. Me, though—I've stopped going around. I know—I'm *dead!*"

"You're in Hell," said Tom. "You know *that?*"

The woman nodded dully but the man shook his head.

"No—I live on Long Island . . . I've got to get to the Penn Station—my train . . . Say, friend—do you have a drink on you? I've got to have a drink!" He felt his throat and a gleam came into his eyes. "A drink—did you hear?"

He reached out to grab Tom who

stepped back.

"Would you like to get out of Hell?" he asked the woman.

She laughed a bitter laugh. "Not a chance! If you can get out—you'd better go!" She glanced nervously about her. "That's the Devil's car, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Tom, "but don't be afraid of me. I'm not from the Devil . . . I want to save you and others like you, if you want to be saved. There's a way you can . . . !"

"Oh, my God!" shrieked the woman, and burst into hysterical laughter, tearing at her hair. "Another damned reformer! . . . Take me away from here . . .!" she grabbed the arm of the man in evening dress. "Take me away!"

"I'm going to Long Island," said the man, politely. "Do you live on Long Island?"

Tom turned and rushed back to the limousine, jumping in.

"Let's get going!" he said. "It's unthinkable! Millions of men and women who don't know their own minds—who've lost all hope and ambition—who don't know they're dead or *do* know and don't care . . . I've seen enough of Hell! . . . I'm going back to Earth and you and all Hell can't stop me!"

CHAPTER X

TOM FINLEY'S resolute decision to leave Hell raised the vibration of his astral body, freed him from the hold his Lower Self had upon him, and precipitated him from the Hell into First Paradise. He found himself standing at the precise spot he had been prior to his departure on the visit to Hell.

"G.A.!" he called, and, this time, to his great relief, the man in white appeared.

"Am I glad to see you!" Tom greeted.

But his Guardian Angel did not reply in kind. He was sober and abrupt in manner.

"You've wasted valuable time," he reprimanded. "Earth conditions could hardly be worse for you. Foreign agents are planning to invade the hospital and take your life. If you can't find some way to prevent this, you'll not get back in your body!"

Tom felt a chilling sensation run through him.

"I'm sorry. I had to go to Hell. I couldn't help myself. But I'm through now—I'm ready to do everything I can to . . . !"

"Then, hurry!" commanded his G.A. "Let's check you out of Heaven and be off!"

He turned Tom in the direction of the Gate marked, "Earthbound Souls."

There, as he had said he would be, was the friendly guard, Harry Bracken, formerly of Chicago.

"Leaving us so soon?" he smiled, taking Tom's life card, handed him by the G.A. and making a notation on it.

"Yes," said the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project. "But I hope to be back, one of these days."

"You won't be going through my Gate when you come, next time," grinned Harry. "You'll arrive the regular way then. But lots of good luck and if you ever get to Chicago—tell my Aunt Minnie and Sister Ruthie that you saw me . . . !"

"Where'll I find them?"

"They're in the phone book," said Harry. "Names are Bracken, same as mine."

"Okay!" said Tom, as he was pushed through the Gate by the man in white. "Stop shoving!" he protested. "I'm moving just as fast as I . . . !"

"Take my hand!" ordered the Guardian Angel. "Make your mind receptive. Think of the Eearth. Direct your

thoughts to the hospital in Los Alamos. *Will* yourself there!"

Tom followed orders. There was a whirring sensation inside his head. He had the feeling of being snatched up into the air and then shot through space.

Almost instantly, unless he had lost consciousness enroute, to which he could not testify, Tom was aware that he was in his hospital room. The man in white still held his hand and they stood suspended in the atmosphere, looking down.

"Here we are," said his Guardian Angel, then, pointing, said: "And there *you* are—your poor physical form which has been taking such a beating. But your condition has recently turned for the better. The afternoon papers stated that you were given a slight chance to recover."

"That's great!" said Tom, relieved. "Do you think I can soon regain consciousness in my body?"

"I doubt it," said his G.A. "There's a piece of your skull pressing against the brain. It'll have to be relieved by operation before you can function."

"I see," reflected Tom, soberly. "When do you think they'll operate?"

"No one knows yet. Depends on how soon you recover sufficient strength. But this isn't your greatest worry now. Enemies of your country want to make certain you don't survive. When the news was published that you were on the mend, their agents went into action. They're going to spirit a man in here tonight, disguised as a specialist, and he's going to inject a poison into your veins which will kill you instantly."

"So that's how it will be done," said Tom. "And I can't get back in my body to warn anybody."

"No, that's not possible—but I've a suggestion."

"What is it?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"Your one hope, in my opinion," proposed his Guardian Angel, "is for you to try to reach the woman you love. She appears to be receptive. If you can arouse her sufficiently to make her come to the hospital and watch over you . . . !"

"Where is she?" broke in Tom.

"At the Laboratory," informed his G.A. "And you might be interested to know that she's been placed in charge of your work."

"She has!" exclaimed Tom, immensely pleased. "Who did that?"

"The Mr. Engle whom you so cordially dislike," smiled the man in white.

"I might have known," said Tom, with a tinge of jealously. 'Where's Bill now?"

"In Washington—but he'll be back soon."

"Hey—how do you know all these things?"

"Your Higher Self is not limted by Time and Space. You could have access to this same knowledge on Earth, if you were enough developed mentally."

"Mighty handy to have this information when you need it," observed Tom. "I'll have to see what I can develop when I get back in my body!"

"You'd better see to it that you have a body to get back into!" warned his G.A. "That's your most important job at the moment!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project nodded, thoughtfully.

"Can you tell me one thing more? At what time is this attempt to be made on my life?"

"At shortly after eleven p.m." informed the man in white. "It's being timed to coincide with the night nurse's coming on duty . . . and this would-be murderer is coming to the hospital disguised as the famous brain specialist, Dr. Danby of Boston, who's expected here. He'll say he's just arrived by

plane and will ask for Dr. Hayden and others on the staff but they will be off duty. This masquerader expects to get the nurse to let him into your room for an examination on the plea that he's got to fly back almost immediately. While she's phoning Dr. Hayden to join him, the agent is counting on getting his chance to inject the poison and walk out of the hospital. By the time your own doctor arrives, you will be dead forever insofar as Earth is concerned."

Tom squeezed the man in white's arm, appreciatively.

"You're a real Guardian Angel all right," he said. "Sounds to me like the scheme's going to work unless I can rouse Clare. Can I go to her?"

"Any time!" said his G.A. "I wouldn't have delayed this long. You may have to work on her for quite awhile before you can get her attention—and, even then, you may not be able to impress her to do what she needs to do for your protection!"

"Give me your hand," requested Tom. "I'm off to see Clare this minute!"

There was a stir in the atmosphere and Tom's astral body disappeared from his hospital room.

CLARE LOGAN had been almost living at the Laboratory since her appointment as Tom Finley's successor in the advanced work being done on the new atomic bomb. Extra guards had been placed on duty at the Los Alamos Atomic Project and there were armed soldiers inside each department where trusted scientists and researchers were working over-time, as well as in the corridors outside and on the grounds. Not the slightest chance was being taken that any repetition of the recent shocking tragedy could occur.

Tonight, Clare was studying all of Tom's confidential notes and papers left behind by Dr. Anapol, trying to determine just how much vital information had been stolen and whether or not any important link in the "know how" of atomic bomb construction was lacking insofar as their own production of the new and improved bomb was concerned.

She was relieved to find that she herself, thanks to her association with the head of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, possessed the knowledge necessary to bridge over any gaps left by the stolen outlines and formulas. Manufacturing of the new and vastly more powerful atomic bomb could therefore proceed successfully, without delay, under her supervision.

Having satisfied herself fully on these points, Clare was putting the papers and documents away, under the watchful eye of a genial soldier boy, when she suddenly started and backed off from the files.

"What's the matter?" asked the soldier, "Bump your head, Miss Logan?"

"No," she replied, standing staring. "No, I'm all right, thanks!"

She resumed her filing but again stopped and backed away. The soldier sauntered toward her, curiously.

"Something bothering you, Miss Logan?"

Clare turned about. "Did you—did you hear anything?" she asked, hesitantly.

"No, ma'am. What did it sound like?"

"Like someone's voice!"

The soldier's eyes widened. "Yeah? . . . Where?"

"Right here by these files!"

"Don't see how that could be, Miss Logan. The files are right up against that wall—and it's soundproof . . . and there's no one on the other side, anyhow."

Clare pushed the files shut and locked them.

"Yes, yes—of course! My imagination."

She turned to her desk, glancing at her wrist watch.

"My—ten-thirty already. No wonder I'm hearing things. I'm dead tired."

An invisible form stood in front of her.

"Listen, Clare!" the presence was saying. "You really did hear me! That was my voice! It's getting close to the deadline—the deadline for me! . . . Clare—this is Tom! . . . I'm in danger! . . . The hospital! . . . Get to the hospital! Save me, Clare! . . . You're the only one who can do it! I'm going to be killed! . . . Clare! Clare—listen to me!"

The woman being addressed from the astral world bowed her head under the subconscious impact of these thoughts being beamed at her. She pressed the palm of her hand against her face, fingers massaging her forehead.

"You'll have to excuse me, Jimmy . . . I feel funny tonight. Lack of sleep. Quite a strain, you know, these days."

"Yes, ma'am, I know," sympathized the young soldier.

"What else can I do?" asked Tom, turning to the man in white, now gently alarmed. "I've been trying for an hour . . . she's too tired, physically and mentally . . . I can't get through to her . . . !"

"Keep at it!" advised his Guardian Angel. "Sometimes when a person gets completely worn out—their conscious resistance is low—and you can reach them easier than when they are mentally alert."

"If I could only make her *see* me!" wished Tom. "Then she wouldn't have any doubt . . . do you suppose . . . ?"

"It's been done," encouraged the man in white. "It's up to you. Get to her any way you can! Your time is running out!"

Clare had gone to the closet and was nervously touching up her hair, applying lipstick, putting on her hat and getting ready to leave for home.

Tom stood in front of the mirror, facing her, as she looked straight through him, fixing herself in the glass.

"Claré!" he spoke, with all the fervor of his being. "Clare! This is Tom! I'm in trouble—serious trouble! Get to the hospital. Go to see me! Go right away!"

SHE started, almost as though she had heard him again, a frightened expression leaping into her eyes.

"Well, Jimmy—you can turn out the lights and lock up. Sorry to be so jittery. Good night!"

The woman Tom was trying to reach crossed toward the door. Tom followed her as she pressed the buzzer near the door to be let out.

"Clare—listen to me! Don't shut me out! You're not imagining things! This is Tom! I need you!"

The door opened and the soldier in the corridor smiled a greeting.

"Calling it a night Miss Logan?"

"Yes, please phone the gate and have them call a taxi for me?" she requested.

"Will do!" said the soldier, crossing toward an inter-departmental phone on the wall. "Good night!"

"She's going home and to bed," moaned Tom. "She can hardly wait to get there. It's no use, G.A. I can . . . !"

"Don't let up! Keep after her!" ordered the man in white. "She's thinking of you . . . wondering . . . worrying . . . !"

Clare Logan left the building and hurried across the grounds, well lighted for protective purposes. At the gate her taxi was waiting—a driver who usually took her home.

"Hello, Mike!" she greeted, as he held the door open for her. "If I'm asleep when you get me home—just carry me up and drop me on the bed!"

Mike grinned. "Okay, Miss Logan. Anything you say. But you shouldn't beat your brains out this way! It ain't good for you!"

He shut the door and climbed behind the wheel as she sank back upon the rear seat closed her eyes, and relaxed. As she did so, an invisible form passed through the door and sat on the seat beside her.

"Clare! You mustn't go home! Tell him to take you to the hospital!" cried Tom.

The taxi pulled away from the curb and shot off down the street.

"Clare! Look! You can see me! Open your eyes, Clare! I'm right here beside you!"

Tom put the full force of his being—all the concentrative power he possessed in this plea. The woman he loved slowly opened her eyes, in a half-sleep state. Then they commenced to widen unbelievingly.

"Clare, dear! You're not dreaming! You're really seeing me! . . . Clare—my life is in danger! . . . Clare—*come to me!*"

The woman who had taken over Tom Finley's atomic work suddenly sat up, staring, horrified, straight at him! Then she clapped hands over her eyes and let out a wild scream.

Mike, at the wheel, swerved and almost hit another car. He glanced back over his shoulder, apprehensively.

"Good gosh, Miss Logan—what's happened?"

"Mike!" cried Clare, excited and upset. Don't take me home. Drive me to the hospital right away! I've just had a feeling that something terrible's happened to Mr. Finley!"

"Jeez, Miss Logan—I hope not!" Her taxi driver altered his course and stepped on the gas.

"Clare!" cried Tom, overjoyed. "You heard me—and saw me, too! That's wonderful! Now listen some more—there's a guy, dressed like a doctor, who's going to try to kill me! . . . Stay in my room, Clare! Stick around! Tell them you've got to see me . . . and don't you leave—no matter if it is late!"

"Oh, Tom," she said, in a low voice. "I hope everything's all right . . . I hope you haven't had a relapse! . . . I hope this was just a hallucination . . . but I thought I . . . oh, hurry, Mike! I don't know why!" she suddenly cried out, leaning forward and beating her hands against the glass partition. "But—hurry!"

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS two minutes to eleven when Clare Logan leaped from the taxi and went running up the steps into Los Alamos hospital.

"Wait for me, Mike!" she called back. "If he's all right, I'll be going on home!"

The night lights were on at the hospital and Miss Casey at the Receiving Desk, recognizing the associate of Thomas Everett Finley, regarded her in some surprise. What she did not see was the figure standing beside Clare Logan. Had she done so, she would probably have fainted.

"Hurry!" Tom was shouting in Clare's ear. "Hurry! Get up to my room at once!"

"Tom—I mean—Mr. Finley—is he all right?" asked Clare, short of breath.

"He seems to be, Miss Logan," said Miss Casey.

"Could I see him, please?"

"Well, it's long after visiting hours, as you know. You act alarmed about something?"

Clare forced a worried smile. "It's probably silly of me but I would like to see Mr. Finley—just look in on him for a moment."

Miss Casey hesitated. "It's against

regulations but, considering your connections with Dr. Finley . . . would you mind waiting a few minutes? Dr. Danby, of Boston, is up seeing him now."

"Dr. Danby?" cried Clare, suddenly concerned. "I thought he wired that he couldn't come!"

Miss Casey shook her head. "I didn't hear about it. Today's papers said he was flying here. He's arrived, at any rate. Dr. Hayden has been notified. We're rounding up the staff and they're coming here to check with Dr. Danby."

"And Dr. Danby is in Mr. Finley's room now? How long has he been there?"

Miss Casey glanced at the wall clock. "Not more than five minutes."

"Hurry!" urged Tom, trying to exert the pressure of his astral body in shoving Clare toward the elevator. "If you don't, it'll be too late!"

"He's getting the needle ready now!" informed the Guardian Angel.

"Clare!" Tom fairly yelled.

The woman he loved started away from the Receiving Desk.

"I'm going up!" she announced.

"But Dr. Danby said he wasn't to be disturbed," protested Miss Casey. "As soon as he comes down—or Dr. Hayden arrives. If he says it's all right . . . !"

Clare had punched the button, bringing the self-service elevator down to the main floor.

"Sorry Miss Casey—I can't wait!"

The Receiving Nurse made a grab for her but she jumped in the elevator, slammed the door and pressed the third floor button. There were two other passengers with her—the astral form of the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project—and a man in white. All three leaped out as the elevator stopped and raced with her down the corridor to the room of Thomas Everett Finley.

Miss Snyder, private nurse on the case, was standing just outside the door. She lifted a warning hand as Clare approached her.

"Sssssh, Miss Logan! You can't go in now. Dr. Danby—you know—the brain specialist from Boston—he's making an examination."

"Don't let her stop you. Break in if you have to!" shouted Tom in Clare's ear.

"Why all the secrecy?" demanded Clare. "Why doesn't he want even you with him? Why hasn't he waited for Mr. Finley's own doctors? I don't like this!"

She pushed Miss Snyder aside and grasped the door knob.

"But, Miss Logan—I've got my orders . . . !"

"Orders be damned!"

Clare pushed the door open. It swung wide and revealed a white-coated figure at the bedside, holding the bared forearm of the unconscious Thomas Everett Finley, about to plunge a hypodermic needle into it!

"Doctor!" shrieked Clare, and leaped forward. "Stop it!"

She hurled herself on him from behind, throwing an arm around the man's neck and snapping his head back. The hypodermic needle clattered to the floor as he sprawled forward off balance.

"That's it, Clare!" cried Tom. "You did just what I wanted you to do. Hang on—till help comes!"

They were rolling over on the floor between bed and wall.

"Miss Logan!" screamed the nurse on duty. "How dare you! . . . Let Dr. Danby up!"

She joined the struggle, grabbing Clare by the hair and trying to pull her off.

THE man attacked tried to recover the hypodermic needle but Clare kicked it under the bed, out of reach,

and sunk her teeth in his arm.

"He's not a doctor!" she cried to Miss Snyder. "He's a fake! No real doctor would give a patient a hypodermic without his own doctors present. I know that much about medicine. Let go of me! Help me hold him!"

The hospital corridor was now in an uproar. Nearby patients were shouting for help.

"Nurse! Nurse!"

"What's going on in there!"

"Call the police, somebody!"

Freeing himself by a herculean burst of strength which flung Clare from him across the room, the alleged Dr. Danby of Boston whipped out a revolver. Instead of aiming it at the women, he turned it on the patient in the bed.

"Look out!" cried Tom, and watched this split second happening in frozen horror.

As his finger squeezed the trigger, Clare came hurtling across the room, striking the intruder at the knees and deflecting his aim. The bullet crashed through the headboard of the bed.

But now Miss Snyder, thoroughly alerted, joined the attack. A second bullet went through the ceiling as she knocked the assailant's arm upward.

White-faced Miss Casey appeared at the door.

"Doctor!" she screamed, looking down the barrel of a revolver.

"Out of my way!" ordered the white-coated gentleman who had appeared so distinguished and commanding on arrival but who now betrayed murderous intent.

She stepped aside, leaning faintly against the corridor wall as he rushed past her and down the stairs. An orderly came running.

"Go after him, Joe!" she cried. "He not a doctor! He's a killer!"

"But he's armed," said Joe, "and I'm not!"

There was the sound of a car motor, suddenly started, and running footsteps on the cement areaway outside. The orderly rushed to the window and looked out.

"There he goes!" he cried

Clare raced to the window. Below her she could see Mike, her taxi driver, standing on the sidewark, staring after the car.

"Mike!" she screamed. "Get that car number. Follow it if you can!"

"Okay, Miss Logan!" Mike shouted, and leaped in his cab.

The intended killer had a block's start as Mike shot off in pursuit.

Dr. Hayden, at the height of this commotion, stepped from the elevator.

"What's happened up here?" he demanded. "Did I hear shots? Where's Dr. Danby?"

"It wasn't Dr. Danby," cried Miss Casey, hysterically. "We were all taken in, Doctor. There's been an attempt made on Mr. Finley's life—and if it hadn't been for Miss Logan . . . !"

Dr. Hayden eyed the disheveled form of Tom Finley's associate. Her face was bleeding at the mouth from a blow she had received. Black hair had tumbled over her shoulders. She was still breathing heavily from the tussle.

"I'm only sorry I couldn't hold him. Doctor," she said. "This is the work of foreign enemies, of course. Our military was stupid in not placing a guard around the hospital with a man of Mr. Finley's great worth to this country confined here."

Dr. Hayden nodded, gravely. "Yes, that's very obvious now. What was this man trying to do?"

"Kill him by injection," reported Clare, following Dr. Hayden into Tom's room. "This failing, he tried to shoot him." She stooped down and felt under

the bed. "Here," she continued, "here's his hypodermic needle. You can bet it has some fatal solution in it."

Dr. Hayden examined the death instrument as Misses Snyder and Casey and other hospital attendants crowded in the doorway.

"Indeed it has," he confirmed. "If this had reached the veins of Mr. Finley he would have been dead almost instantly. There's enough strychnine in here to have killed ten men." Then, turning to Miss Logan, he asked, pointedly. "How did you chance to call on Mr. Finley at this time? Did you have some advance warning?"

A greatly relieved Tom, standing by in the astral, nudged his Guardian Angel and winked, knowingly.

"Yes," he heard Clare reply. "I can't explain it, Doctor—but I believe I *did* receive—*an advance warning!*"

* * *

THE daring attempt on the life of the critically injured Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project was sensational news throughout the world. His assailant, despite a dragnet established by the police, F.B.I. and Military Authorities, in the state of New Mexico, had not yet been apprehended. The would-be murderer's car, however, with license number furnished by Mike O'-Connor, Miss Logan's taxi driver, had been found abandoned some forty miles from Los Alamos. There the trail of the enemy agent and his accomplices had vanished. While no one reported having witnessed a plane in the area, it was speculated that this agent may have made his getaway in the same manner that Dr. Androv Anapol had escaped.

Miss Clare Logan, attractive dark-haired associate of Thomas Everett Finley, was played up in all news reports as the heroine, being credited with saving her superior's life through having come to the hospital "on a hunch." Photographed shortly after the incident, Miss Logan still showed the effects of her struggle with the attacker. Her statement to the press had been carefuly worded:

"I left my work at the Laboratory about ten-thirty, bent on going home and to bed. I had suddenly become uneasy about the welfare of Mr. Finley and attributed my feelings to overwork and nerve-strain. However, in the taxi, on the way home, my feelings became so strong that I was compelled to go by the hospital to investigate. I'm extremely grateful, under the circumstances, that I did!"

Secretary of Defense Bill Engle in Washington, advised by long distance phone of the occurrence and then reading the morning papers, called "the woman in the news," reaching her as she was about to leave for the Laboratory.

"How are you this morning? Feeling all right?" he asked, solicitously.

"Yes, thank you," replied Clare. "As 'all right' as I *can* feel, I guess, until I know positively whether or not Mr. Finley will recover—and until this world crisis is over."

Bill Engle's voice was grave. "Don't expect too much too soon," he said. "I want to commend you for your courageous act of last night. It's the talk of Washington today."

"Anyone in my position would have done the same," Clare rejoined, modestly.

"But no one did!" Bill Engle insisted. "And how you got the feeling that something was about to happen is beyond me. You're going to have me believing in psychic phenomena or premonition or whatever you call it, if you keep on!"

Clare laughed. "I don't understand it myself—but there is something to it!"

"Listen, young woman!" said the Secretary of Defense. "Tom Finley is not expendable and neither are you. I've ordered police protection for you, too. When you leave the apartment this morning, you'll be followed."

"Oh, no!" protested Clare. "I don't want that!"

"Can't help it. These are dangerous times . . . and after your thwarting this attempted assassination last night, you're very apt to be marked for death yourself. I don't mean to alarm you, Clare—I mean—Miss Logan—but you must be extremely careful from this moment on."

Clare caught her breath. "It's nice of you, Mr. Engle to be so concerned about me—but I have no fear. I . . . !"

"I'm sure you haven't," cut in the Secretary. "But you mean too much to the government—and—to *me*—to run the risk of anything happening, I'm flying back to Los Alamos this afternoon. You're having dinner with me!"

"But, Mr. Engle, I . . . . !"

"Those are orders!" said the Secretary of Defense, and hung up.

THE Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project was greatly disturbed.

"This is one hell of a situation to be in!" he raved to his Guardian Angel. "Stymied here, between two worlds! Unable to get back in my body. Unable to stop Bill Engle from romancing with the woman I love. Unable to help stop a third World War! I feel like a football star who's being kept on the sidelines when his team is losing. I don't see how the authorities in Heaven ever expected me to save the peoples on Earth, handicapped the way I am! It was all I could do to get Clare to save my own life!"

The man in white laughed.

"But you did it, didn't you? That's the main thing! You can accomplish more than you think in this existence, once you learn how to go about it!"

Tom Finley pondered this remark.

"For instance?" he demanded.

His Guardian Angel smiled. "Dr. Anapol has just arrived in Moscow. He has gone into conference with Russia's Big Five who control the destiny of the Soviet Union. Decisions are being made there which will determine the fate of civilization!"

"There you are!" cried Tom, concernedly. "Now if I was back on Earth . . . !"

"You couldn't do as much as you might be able to do here," finished his G.A.

"What do you mean?"

"Could you go to Russia and appeal to their leaders? Could you even know what is going on?"

"That's right, I couldn't!" Tom thought a moment, then turned on his Guardian Angel, excitedly. "I get it! . . . I can attend this conference if I want to!"

The man in white smiled, and nodded. "All you have to do is *will* yourself there!"

"But I don't understand Russian . . . I couldn't . . . !"

"You can read thoughts before they are put into words," reminded his G.A. "You'll know what is going on!"

"Give me your hand!" requested Tom. "Turn on the power! I should have realized—I'm in position to do what no anti-Communist can do. I can get behind the 'Iron Curtain' . . . !"

There was the usual stir in the atmosphere and the astral form of Thomas Everett Finley disappeared.

THE Kremlin was in a state of great excitement. After years of highest tension, it was clearly evident at last that the international boil was getting

ready to burst. Who would break it open first—the United States and her allies or Russia and her satellites—had been the Number One Question of the time. But this question would soon be answered with both opposing capitols in a fever heat of conferences of top authorities.

The Big Five of Russia, now in executive session behind locked and guarded doors, held the power to decree atomic warfare—and unleash an attack within hours of the issuance of this decree.

It was, at such a moment, that the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, piloted by his Guardian Angel, arrived in the upper atmosphere above Moscow and, again becoming conscious of his surroundings, looked down upon a truly beautiful city.

Moscow's lofty modern buildings towered over quaint remnants of Czarist Russia. Tom, floating leisurely above the metropolis, thrilled at the sight of ancient winding streets with their strange dwellings, opening suddenly into wide public squares which were decorated with bright-colored flowerbeds and usually contained a shining subway station.

"This form of travel beats jet propulsion," said Tom. "You can apparently go as fast or as slow as you desire. How long has it taken us to get here from New Mexico?"

"How long does it take you to snap your fingers?" replied the man in white.

"Incredible!" said Tom, "then we came here with the speed of thought!"

"Exactly!" confirmed his G.A. "Once you know how to travel in the astral, you only have to think of a place and you are there. Remember—I have told you that your Subconscious—the real you—is not limited by Time and Space! If you get back to Earth and can recall this fact, the knowledge might, one day, be of value to you!"

"Thanks for the tip," said Tom. "I'll try to remember." Then, looking over the picturesque landscape of modern structures intermingled with ancient, he asked: "Where's the much talked about Kremlin? Is that it over there?"

He pointed and the man in white nodded. "You couldn't miss it," he smiled. "It looks just like the photographs and it's build around the former palace of the Czar!"

"Well guarded, too!" Tom observed, as he saw a line of soldiery about the grounds.

"Yes, you can be sure that no one is admitted to the Kremlin who is not thoroughly checked," said the man in white. "And it's impossible for anyone to get through to the Inner Chamber where this conference is being held unless he belongs."

Tom grinned, enjoying his superior position in the astral. "You mean, of course, anyone on Earth!"

The Guardian Angel nodded.

"You will probably be shocked at what you are about to hear," he warned. "Your friend, Dr. Anapol is reporting to the Big Five now. Shall we enter the locked room and sit in on the meeting?"

"I'd be delighted!" said Tom, grimly.

INSTANTLY the panoramic view of Moscow blurred out and another scene came into focus. Five men were seated about a massive oak table in a small room, with high windows, listening to a sixth man who was standing, addressing them.

Generalissimo Karlinski was presiding, with his four top ministers, Dimitrov, Rodzinoff, Sarkov and Malarvich all paying close attention to Dr. Androv Anapol.

"And so, comrades," he was conclud-

ing. "My mission, which has required years, has ended—as you can see—in success. I have brought with me the latest secrets in atomic bomb construction. Our position is no longer inferior to that of the United States!"

The Generalissimo, a heavily bearded man with dark black eyes and an even blacker cigar, hit the conference table with a pudgy fist.

"You have done well, Comrade Anapol—but your mission was not an entire success!"

The stocky Russian-American, obviously expecting high praise from his superiors, looked astonished and crestfallen.

"In what way have I failed?"

"You bungled in your attack on America's atomic genius," rebuked the Premier. "When you had the opportunity, you should have killed him."

"I am sorry," said Dr. Anapol.

"It is not enough to be sorry when our great nation is threatened by the Capitalistic World!" denounced Minister Dimitrov.

"But he is not the only one who has failed," said the Generalissimo. "I have here a dispatch just received." He brandished a piece of paper. "The attack we ordered on Mr. Finley in the hospital likewise did not succeed—because of a woman!"

This was apparently news to Dr. Anapol.

"That is unfortunate," he said, guardedly.

"Extremely," replied Generalissimo Karlinski, pointedly, "since this woman might also have been killed by you."

"You mean—it was Dr. Clare Logan?" asked a chagrined Dr. Anapol.

The ministers nodded, with censuring glances.

"You were too tender-hearted, Comrade," spoke Minister Malarvich. "You risked your own life in obtaining the secrets, which is commendable—but you could have taken two lives and seriously handicapped our enemy."

"You forget, comrades," protested Dr. Anapol, "that I worked with these two people for years. I differed with them ideologically and politically, of course—but one cannot be thrown in close association all this time without having some feeling . . . !"

There was a murmur of unsympathetic dissent.

"Sentiment like that is weakness!" reproved Minister Rodzinoff. "Your sparing of these two scientists may cost us millions of lives!"

Dr. Anapol bowed his head, unanswering.

Tom Finley, in the atmosphere above him, regarded his former associate, feelingly.

"I can sense his thoughts," he said to his Guardian Angel. "Androv regrets now that he performed this service for the Soviet Union. He thought he'd be proclaimed a national hero. Now he sees that he'll be given no public credit, no appreciation. He could be a real force for us in Russia if I could only get to him!"

"Why don't you try?" encouraged the man in white.

Tom descended in the astral until he stood on a level with Dr. Anapol, facing him.

"Androv!" he spoke.

Dr. Anapol lifted his head and looked through him at the Big Five. His attitude was defiant.

"You may call it weakness, comrade, but I do not regret my failure to kill them. I am not a killer in that sense. I have only been interested in protecting my country. And if that is not enough . . . !"

The fist of the Generalissimo hit the

table, with gavel-like force.

"I suggest, Doctor, that you say no more!"

Tom, excitedly watching developments, cried out: "Did you get that, Androv? *Doctor!* . . . you're a comrade no longer. These are the rulers you risked everything for! Stand up to them, Androv! Show them you've still got some American spirit in your veins. There's lots of things worse than death! You've got a chance to do the world some good by . . . !"

The fervor of Tom's outburst had set up a vibration in the atmosphere. His thoughts found lodgment in Androv's consciousness and touched his psychic center. For a moment, the former Russian-American scientist looked in upon the astral world and saw Tom's form before him.

"Tom!" he screamed, and covered his face with his hands, backing away.

All members of the Big Five leaped to their feet, looking apprehensively about.

"He sees me!" cried Tom, overjoyed, advancing toward his former associate. "Androv—tell these professional killers that they'd better not start anything. If they do...!"

DR. ANAPOL, taking his hands from his eyes, looked again and still saw Tom before him. He backed frantically against the wall.

"Look, comrades!" he cried. "It's Tom Finley—the man you've been trying to kill! He's right here—in this room!"

"Where? I don't see him!" said the Generalissimo.

"There!" shrieked Dr. Anapol, and pointed.

"He's gone crazy!" said Minister Sarkov, nervously. "There's no one here—there couldn't be! We're locked in!"

Dr. Anapol pressed hands to his head. "He's gone now!" he moaned. "But he was here—lock or no lock. He spoke to me!"

Generalissimo Karlinski exchanged consulting glances with his ministers, all of whom had received bad shocks.

"Yes, Doctor?" he replied, mockingly. "What did he say?"

"I didn't get all the words—but he told me to warn you not to start anything . . . I got the feeling that something unspeakable would happen to you . . . and Russia, if you did...!"

Dr. Anapol's statement was met with raucous laughs and scoffing banter.

"You are either out of your mind, Doctor, or you are putting on a very poor act," declared the head of the Soviet Union. "Your nerves are not what they should be. I recommend that you spend the night in the hospital under observation. If you see any more apparitions . . . !"

"I am not in the habit of seeing apparitions!" rejoined Tom Finley's forfer associate. "When I say I saw this man here—I saw him. Explaining it is another matter. Perhaps he may have died and...!"

"You are getting more and more fantastic, Doctor!" branded Minister Dimitrov. "We have too many important things to decide to listen longer to your ramblings. Report to the hospital as the Generalissimo has ordered. I will call to see you tomorrow and bring Professor Roanov with me to check over your atomic bomb material. Get a good night's rest and get rid of the spooks!"

Dr. Androv Anapol, recovering from his fright, was furious.

"Don't let 'em talk you out of it!" Tom said in his ear. "You saw me and you know it! You won't forget this, Androv. It's made a life-long impression on you. We've got to work together to prevent war between our two countries.

Did you hear, Androv—we've got to work together...!"

Reluctantly, the man who had so recently flown from the United States to his native country, picked up his papers, stuffed them in a brief case, and crossed over to the door.

"I don't know exactly what I have just seen means," he said as a parting shot. "But I am certain, gentlemen, that it bodes no good for us. I urge you to make sure we are ready for war before launching it. If you don't...!"

The Generalissimo used his fist again on the table.

"You have made your report, Doctor!" he boomed. "Get out—and follow orders!"

"Yes, sir!" bowed Dr. Anapol.

A key sounded in the lock of the heavy door. It swung open. An armed guard fell in alongside the departing visitor to the Inner Chamber. It was then that Dr. Anapol realized, as Tom divined through his consciousness, that he was a captive in his own country!

CHAPTER XII

THE same secluded booth in the Los Alamos Inn served as the dining location for the Secretary of Defense and his woman companion.

Bill Engle, arriving on a late afternoon plane, had met with his Military Board and recessed for the dinner hour that he might confer in private with Tom Finley's attractive successor.

There were flowers on the table, by his order, beautiful, long-stemmed red roses. Candles caught up this color and reflected it in a pink tint against Clare's neck and cheeks.

"These are exciting times," said the Secretary of Defense, "Internationally—and *personally*."

Clare added a blush to the color already in her face.

"Don't you think, Mr. Engle, as a military man, you are moving a bit too fast on the attack? You are not yet fully acquainted with the subject of your attentions and there are other matters of far greater strategic importance!"

Her frank challenge brought a laugh from the direct, quick-acting Secretary of Defense.

"Some of the strongest positions have been won by sudden, bold assault," he countered. "I believe in letting a woman know when I like her. Besides," he added, as Clare eyed him, questioningly. "There are such demands upon me these days, that I must take full advantage of what little time is available for romance."

There was a stir in the atmosphere near the table and an invisible form sat beside Clare on the bench, facing Bill Engle.

"Wait a minute!" said Tom Finley. "Not so fast, Bill! Give me a chance to get back on Earth! That's dirty pool making love to Clare while I'm out of the picture."

There was a moment of silence between the two diners. Clare Logan was obviously embarrassed and at a temporary loss for words.

Tom turned to his Guardian Angel. "I'm reading her mind! Ye gods, G.A. she likes the guy! She's never been rushed like this before—and she's just about bowled over by his interest in her."

The man in white nodded.

"That often happens. Another man softens a woman up, romantically, and when he doesn't confess his love for her, she goes to someone else on the rebound!"

Tom grabbed Clare by the arm but she gave no notice of it.

"Listen, Clare—this is Tom. Don't fall

for that bird. You really love me—and I love you! . . . Don't listen to his sales talk!"

Clare took a few bites of food, then dabbed her lips lightly with the napkin, and raised her eyes to look at the distinguished gentleman who was courting her.

"Don't you think, Mr. Engle, it would be wise for both of us to keep our minds on our responsibilities at the moment."

There was a wavering look in her eyes and Bill Engle, placing a hand over hers at the table edge, pressed his assumed advantage.

"Clare, we're not moon-struck high-school kids. We're both mature adults. I've been married once, as you know. It didn't take because my wife and I didn't have enough interests in common. But, with you and me, we know right off that our interests dove-tail. Now that I've found you—I want you . . . I need you . . . !"

"Cut it out!" broke in Tom. Thrusting his arm across the table, he shoved his rival in the face with the palm of his hand. Bill Engle, beyond blinking, paid no heed.

That Clare Logan was emotionally stirred, there was no doubt.

"Think of me! . . . Think of me! . . . Think of me!" Tom repeated, projecting this thought with all the astral power he could gather. "Take your time. Clare! You may like him but you can't be sure yet that you love him!"

"You are very persuasive," said Clare, almost as though she were reacting to Tom's influence. "And I'm flattered by your regard for me—but I can't reach personal decisions this quickly." She gently withdrew her hand.

TOM'S sigh of relief almost created an air wave in the ether.

"That's telling him, Clare! Hold him off till I get back and can talk to you!"

The Secretary of Defense refused to retreat.

"I'm accustomed to taking my objectives," he warned.

The woman whose love he sought glanced at her wrist watch.

"It's about time you were resuming your military conference," she evaded. "Tell me, what do you really think of the immediacy of war?"

Tom, following the operation of Bill Engle's mind, grasped his surprise and horror.

"He's deciding on whether or not to attack Russia tonight!" he said to the man in white.

His Guardian Angel nodded. "Of course, according to United States law, Congress has to declare war before . . . !"

"He's figuring on some way to get around that, on the excuse that it is the only way to save us," sensed Tom. "That's dangerous thinking. I wonder what he'll say to Clare . . . .?"

The Secretary of Defense had delayed his reply, his face had sobered and he was watching a flickering candle which had burned low, running hot wax over the side of the dish and down on the table.

"I can't answer that question," he said, finally. "War might come tomorrow—it might hold off for two weeks—but it's clearly evident now that war is inevitable!"

Tom turned helplessly to the man in white.

"What can I do about that?" he demanded. "I can't reach Bill's mind from here in a million years. Only way to get anywhere with him is to face him in a cold-blooded argument and slug it out. If I could only tell him what I know now . . . !"

"Do you think he'd believe it?" asked

the G.A.

"He'd *have* to believe it!" said Tom.

"You'd better use the one channel of communication you have open," suggested his Guardian Angel. "Get to him through Clare, if you can. She has more influence over him in a second than you'll have in a life-time!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project fixed his attention on the woman he loved.

"Clare!" he addressed, willing his thoughts toward her, "You don't want war. You know I've never wanted it. Beg Bill not to be too hasty. Get him to hold off. For a few days, anyway. Speak to him, Clare! Don't let him go to this meeting in his present frame of mind!"

Secretary of Defense Engle was rising from the table but Clare, on seeming impulse, caught his arm. There was appeal in her eyes.

"Bill," she said. "Don't ever say that again. Promise me—don't ever say it!"

"Say, what?" asked her dinner companion, surprised.

"That war is *inevitable!*" said Clare. "When you say that and think it—there's no hope for Mankind—we might as well stop striving, hoping, living now . . . !"

Tom, in the astral, gave Clare a slap on the back as he cried out: "Great stuff! It registered! I go through!"

The man in white smiled and shook his head. "Not necessarily, this time, Tom. Give her credit for having some humanitarian urges, too. This could have been coincidence!"

"But she's saying just what I wanted her to say!" Tom exulted. "Not my words exactly—but the very thought!"

"Yes—that often happens when two souls think and feel alike," said his Guardian Angel.

Bill Engle was speaking. "In today's world, Clare, you have to be a realist. The inevitability of war may not be pleasant to contemplate but...!"

"Just the same," Clare argued, feelingly. "If you go into a conference with this conviction, you'll see no other way out. Tom—I mean—Mr. Finley hoped and believed that his improvement of the atomic bomb would rule out war for all time. If he recovers . . . !"

"But there's no guarantee of that—and we can't wait . . . !" protested the Secretary of Defense. "You can see how desperate our enemies are—trying to kill him . . ."

"They'll fear him and our country more—just because he's still alive!" said Clare. "I may be able to carry on for him—but I'm not Thomas Everett Finley—he's been the real brains of this atomic project . . . you know that, Bill . . . the world knows it . . . that's why I've been praying so hard for him to pull through . . . If he'd only recover consciousness so we could consult...!"

BILL ENGLE was now keeping track of time by his own wrist watch.

"I'm due at the conference in five minutes," he said. "Just time to run you home if we hurry."

"I've a strong feeling about this!" Clare persisted. "Mr. Finley's held on, he's gaining some strength . . . they told me at the hospital that Dr. Danby was really arriving by plane tomorrow. If he decides to operate—we'll know before too long whether Mr. Finley lives or not—whether we can count on any further guidance from him. But we're playing with forces which may wreck this planet, Bill . . . not just destroy Russia or any one country! Please go slow! Please don't make a decision which can't be recalled . . . it's too great a responsibility for any military leader or board . . . "

"But if we hold out too long and let ourselves be attacked!" rejoined the Sec-

retary of Defense. "What then? Won't I be held even more responsible?"

He was piloting her out of the Los Alamos Inn, stopping only long enough to pay the cashier. Tom Finley, following along on one side of Clare, held one arm as Bill Engle held the other.

"Good going, Clare!" he shouted in her ear. "Don't let up! Get him to promise! It's our one chance of avoiding world catastrophe!"

The Secretary of Defense hailed a taxi and helped Clare in. He was unaware of the fact that another passenger was riding with them—that he was sharing the company of the woman with whom he was infatuated.

"Some things in the world today are beyond the judgment of mere men," said Clare. "Atomic war, no matter who starts it, means world destruction. We've had years of what's been called 'the cold war of nerves.' It's easy to precipitate war—one order can do it today, on either side. But war doesn't solve world problems and conditions. It ends all!"

Clare was hitting deep now, catching Bill's attention and holding it. Tom could sense it as he saw the Secretary of Defense staring thoughtfully at the floor of the cab.

"If war is the only future for the world—then love and romance mean nothing . . . you've been wasting your time paying court to me," said Clare, "as you would, paying court to *any* woman," she added, as he looked up, hopefully.

"Your woman's point of view has very little military logic in it," he said, "but it has force, nevertheless." He took her hand and pressed it to his lips. "All right, Clare—I'll go into this conference with an open mind. But I warn you—members of the Board are pretty generally decided that we've dilly-dallied far too long already. It won't be easy to slow them up now."

"A few more days!" pleaded Clare. "I don't know why I feel this so strongly—but give the world one more chance to right itself before it's blasted to pieces for all time!"

They were nearing Clare's apartment house; the taxi was slowing down for a stop. Bill Engle suddenly seized Clare in his arms and kissed her—a long, strong embrace.

"You wolf!" said Tom. "Let her go!"

CLARE'S struggle to free herself from the pressure of his lips on hers was unavailing until he released her. Then, as she gasped for breath, he swung open the taxi door and stepped out, with the cab waiting at the curb.

"You win!" he smiled. "I'll play your hunch and delay matters as much as I can—a few days, anyway."

Clare gave him her hand and he helped her from the taxi. She looked up at him with tear-rimmed eyes.

"I don't think you'll ever regret it, Bill," she said. And then added abruptly. "Thanks for a nice dinner. Good night!"

She broke away from him and hurried up her apartment house steps. He started after her but thought better of it as Tom interposed his astral body. There was no indication, however, that the Secretary of Defense had seen the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project as he turned back to the taxi.

Tom, watching the cab out of sight, looked around for his usually visible companion—the main in white. But he saw, in his stead, the man in black.

"Hello! What brings *you* here?" he demanded.

"You!" grinned his D.H. "Didn't you want to kill that guy?"

"I felt like it for a moment," Tom admitted, "but if kissing Clare is the price for a few more days' grace on

atomic warfare, I guess I can stand it!"

"She's falling for him, you know that!" taunted the man in black. "But if he goes against her wishes and decides on war . . . !"

"He won't do that," said Tom, with positive assurance. "And I don't want him to! She's got him committed. We're safe for a few days at least . . . !"

"Oh, yes? . . . How about Russia?"

"Russia, too!" said Tom. "I'd bet on it!"

The man in black laughed.

"And you might lose! But you've got an even bigger chance of losing Clare. What are you going to do about that?"

"I'm going to get back in my body, somehow!" Tom replied, "and give Bill Engle the run of his life!"

"You're more apt to be meeting me in Hell," predicted his Devil's Helper. "They'll be getting around soon to an operation on your brain—and these aren't too successful."

"Cheerful fellow!" branded Tom. "I don't like you and never did! Get out! I hope I never see you again . . . !"

"You'll see me!" declared the man in black, "and you'll need me—before you're out of your mess!"

He faded from view and the man in white appeared.

"Well, Tom!" he greeted, "the next twenty-four hours will determine whether or not you return to Earth!"

"What's going to happen?"

"Dr. Hayden and staff have decided, when Dr. Danby arrives tomorrow, to ask him to operate at once," informed his Guardian Angel. "This means you'll have to stand by because you may have to re-enter your physical body in a hurry, once that brain pressure is relieved."

Tom could hardly control his joy.

"That's great!" he cried.

"Great—if you live!" warned his G.A. "Come on—no more chasing around. You've got to remain in your hospital room till this crisis is over!"

CHAPTER XIII

THERE was the strong smell of ether in the hospital room of Thomas Everett Finley. He had just been brought back, still unconscious, from the operating room. A perspiring and nerve-worn Dr. Danby was being congratulated by Dr. Hayden and attending physicians and surgeons.

"A masterly and most delicate job, Doctor!"

"Thank you, gentlemen—but it's too early to tell yet. With such widespread brain injury, I am not too certain of the patient's ability to recover. We are fortunate he did not die on the table."

"But isn't it true, Doctor?" asked one of the staff, "that if the patient *does* respond, with this brain pressure removed, recovery will be fairly rapid?"

"It quite often is, yes—but I can hold out no promise. Mr. Finley, however, seems to have a fairly strong constitution. If he regains consciousness, this will aid materially. The next few hours should determine one way or the other."

Tom Finley, standing in the room beside his physical body, looked anxiously at his Guardian Angel.

"Well, G.A. what do *you* think?" he asked.

The man in white shook his head. "Whether a man lives or dies at any given moment," he said, "is extremely difficult to predict. The will to live has kept humans alive for months and years after their bodies were completely useless. You have an enormous will to live because you feel you still have a job to do on Earth. This has kept you going thus far. However, things can happen even beyond human control, at times. You can only be sure you're going to

survive when you've really done it!"

"You're very consoling " said Tom. "But do you think, even if I should die, that I'll regain consciousness in my physical body before I do?"

"I'd say your chances are fairly good for that," hazarded his Guardian Angel. "With the pressure removed, your consciousness should be able to function once more—that is, if certain brain centers have not been permanently damaged."

"You're not any more encouraging than the doctors!" Tom complained. "And all I can do is wait around and be ready to return or leave, depending on how my physical body reacts to the operation?"

"That's all," said the man in white, "so you might as well relax and make the best of it!"

The doctors and surgeons left the room, with Miss Snyder, the nurse, on duty. She seated herself by the bed and took up a magazine. Tom looked over her shoulder.

"Might have known it," he observed to his G. A. "Love story."

Miss Snyder turned a page.

"Wait a minute," said Tom, "I hadn't finished reading that yet."

She turned back, as though forgetting something, and turned again. Tom was startled.

"Coincidence!" smiled the man in white. "You can't reach minds on Earth that easily!"

It was difficult killing time and Tom commenced pacing about his small hospital room like a prisoner in a cell. His Guardian Angel sat on the end of the bed and laughed at him.

"You're worse than a new soul waiting to be born!" he chided. "You've got an Eternity ahead of you—just be patient. Everything happens in its good time."

Tom registered disgust. "This is serious—and you know it. Every hour that goes by decreases my chances of saving this planet from . . . !"

"Have a little more faith!" counseled the man in white. "You have the forces of Heaven on your side. As long as you're working for them, they're working with you. I don't think it'll be long now . . .!"

Tom stopped pacing. "I hope not!" he said, and walked over, playfully jabbing Miss Snyder in the ribs. She fidgeted and changed position several times, and rubbed a spot under one arm. Tom grinned and queried, mockingly: "Coincidence again?"

"You shouldn't play with your astral powers," reproved his Guardian Angel. "That's what many earthbound souls do —and it often leads to trouble."

"Well, if they have to hang around like this with time on their hands, I wouldn't blame them for cutting up!" said Tom. "I'm just about ready to go nuts!"

THERE was a knock on his hospital room door. Tom crossed over and stood by as Miss Snyder arose and opened the door. An attractive dark-haired woman and a distinguished appearing gentleman stood before her.

"Oh, good evening, Miss Logan," she greeted. "How do you do, Mr. Engle!"

"Is Mr. Finley—has he shown any signs of regaining consciousness?" asked the woman.

"Not yet," said Miss Snyder. "Would you care to come in a minute?"

The two visitors nodded, and tiptoed into the room, looking toward the figure in the bed.

"Hello, Clare!" addressed Tom, taking her arm and walking over with her. "You look beautiful tonight. I suppose he's been telling you that already. Stick around—I've a strong feeling that I'm going to . . .!" He couldn't finish. Something was commencing to happen to him.

He sensed a strong pull in the direction of his physical body. "G. A.!" he called, panic-stricken. "The time's come! I've got to go—but how about you—where will you be?"

The man in white smiled. "Don't worry! I'll be around as I've been from the beginning. But you can't see me on Earth."

"I know—but how can I tell you're with me?" asked Tom.

"You'll get strong hunches like you used to do . . . premonitions . . . feelings . . . flashes of intuition . . . you won't call them 'coincidence' any more—you'll know that I'm there, in your consciousness, with you!" reasurred his Guardian Angel.

Tom held out his hand. "Goodbye for now, G. A. I can't ever thank you enough . . .!"

"Yes you can—just accomplish what you are going back to Earth to do!" said the man in white, as he gave Tom's hand a friendly squeeze.

A thin, barely visible band of magnetic current, connecting Tom's astral body with his physical form on the bed, suddenly quickened and intensified.

The Guardian Angel released Tom's hand and his astral body immediately shot up in a horizontal plane, gliding over to a position above the material body. Tom felt a sinking sensation as the two forms merged into one—and then lost consciousness.

"Miss Snyder!" spoke the attractive, dark-haired woman at the bedside. "Come here, please—Mr. Finley just opened his eyes and looked at me!"

The nurse crossed quickly to the other side of the bed.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"Yes," confirmed the man visitor. "I saw it myself."

"That's a good sign. He must be coming to," said Miss Snyder. Then, addressing the patient, she said: "Mr. Finley—do you hear me?"

The eyelids fluttered.

"Tom!" called Clare, fervently. "Tom!"

The eyes opened again and gave her a long look. A light moan came from the half-parted lips.

"Tom!" Clare repeated, taking his hand.

His fingers gave her hand a slight pressure and she turned to the man beside her. "Bill, he hears me, He's just signalled by pressing my hand."

The Secretary of Defense bent forward. "Tom—this is Bill Engle—remember *me*?"

The eyes opened once more, seeking out the possessor of the voice. They rested on him and recognition came, with a faint smile.

"Sure—I remember you!" Then the eyes went to the woman and remained on her as a hand tightened over hers. "Clare—it's good to see you."

"Oh, Tom!" she cried. "I'm so glad you've come back to us . . .!"

"Come back?" he echoed, dazedly. "Then you *know* . . .?"

"I know—*what*?" asked Clare, puzzled.

"Know where I've been?" he asked.

"Why - - you've been unconscious!" she said, after a bewildered glance at her escort.

"No," said Tom, gaining strength, "I've been in Hell!"

"You certainly have," sympathized Bill Engle.

"I've been in Heaven, too!" Tom added as his mind commenced to clear and the memory of recent out-of-the-body experiences seeped in from his deep Subconscious.

"You mean—you're in Heaven now," corrected the Secretary of Defense, "after what you've gone through!"

Tom's brow clouded. His eyes sought out Clare's for a possible light of understanding. "No," he said, "I've been to

both places . . . they're very real! And Heaven isn't ready for atomic warfare yet. They can't take care of a hundred million souls—even half that number. We've got to prevent war, Bill . . ."

TOM'S excitement was growing. He tried to raise up but Miss Snyder gently pushed him back on the pillow.

"You must be quiet, Mr. Finley. Everything is all right . . .!" Then, to the woman and gentleman visitor she said: "It's the ether. He's not entirely out from under it yet. It makes him imagine things and that's getting him upset. Would you two step out for awhile . . .? When he calms down and his mind clears, I'll call you!"

"My mind is clear right now!" protested Tom. "And these are the two people I want most to see. It's very important, nurse! Don't let them go!"

"In a little while, Mr. Finley. You must rest now," said Miss Snyder, as Clare Logan and Bill Engle moved toward the door.

"Bill—Clare—stay here!" commanded the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project. "I've got to talk to you. There's no time to lose . . . !"

"We'll be back!" promised Clare.

Tom raised his bandaged head from the pillow.

"Listen, you two—I'm not out of my mind. I know what I'm talking about. I've been to Russia. I attended the conference of the Big Five and heard Dr. Anapol make part of his report! I've seen things since I've been out of this world . . . I know it sounds incredible—but it's true . . . and I can prove it!"

Bill Engle exchanged knowing glances with the nurse. He took Clare by the arm.

"That's all very interesting, old man. We'll talk to you about it some other time. Glad you're coming out of it. Take it easy, Tom—nothing to worry about . . .!"

So saying, the Secretary of Defense and the woman who had taken over Tom Finley's duties on the Atomic Project, stepped from the room.

Miss Snyder busied herself about the bed, smoothing covers and pillow. Tom eyed her, wrathfully.

"You're one of these damned efficient nurses, aren't you?" he said. "Think you're doing the right thing. Humor the patient. Kid him along. You're the same smart little girl who wouldn't believe Miss Logan when she told you that 'Doctor' who tried to kill me was a phony!"

Miss Snyder suppressed a shriek of surprise.

"How did *you* know?" she gasped.

"I was here, wasn't I?" snapped Tom.

"Yes—but you—you were *unconscious*!" declared Miss Snyder, in growing terror.

"I certainly was *not*!" denied Tom. "I saw the whole thing. You even attacked Miss Logan—trying to help that phony . . . until he pulled a gun. Then you tried to make up for the mistake by turning on him. I suppose, at that, I should thank you for saving my life—the way you hit his arm and spoiled his aim . . .!"

"Mr. Finley!" cried Miss Snyder, eyes bulging. "You're positively *uncanny!* I don't understand it. Excuse me while I call the doctor . . . I'll be right back . . . excuse me!"

She ran from the room and Thomas Everett Finley had his first moment alone since coming to—his first moment to reflect on what had happened since he'd been struck down in his office—and had regained consciousness here.

Amazing—but true! He was positive of it—his carry-over memory from the state he had been in was too clear and vivid. He hoped this memory wouldn't leave him. Maybe he'd better take no chances . . . call in a stenographer and dictate everything to her . . . As of now there was perfect continuity—he recalled the

man in white and the man in black—the states of Heaven and Hell—the rulers he had met there. Yes—this wasn't any dream—this had been a rare adventure—and the people of the world should hear of it!

Ridiculous for this nure to be chasing off after a doctor! He must speak further to Bill Engle and Clare—Clare, anyway ....!

Dr. Hayden came hurrying in, followed by Dr. Danby and Miss Snyder.

"Well, Finley," he greeted, "Glad to find you're awake! You had quite a siege of it. This is Dr. Danby who operated. You've heard of Dr. Danby of Boston ....?"

"Yes, of course," said Tom. "I watched my operation. Very interesting!"

"You see, Doctor," said Miss Snyder, in a low voice, "that's the way he's been talking ever since he's ....!"

"I know it sounds impossible," said Tom, "but I've been conscious ever since I was injured—not in the body, in some higher state. I've had experiences. You gentlemen must believe me . . . !"

"What do you make of this, Doctor?" Dr. Hayden inquired, guardedly, of Dr. Danby.

THE famous brain specialist felt Tom's pulse, looked into his eyes, patted his hand.

"You are coming along fine, Mr. Finley. I'm having to return to Boston within the hour—but you're getting on fine. In a couple of weeks ....!"

"Listen, gentlemen!" said the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project. "Stop kidding me and kidding yourselves. There may not be any world in two weeks! . . . You've saved my life and I wanted to come back to Earth to help prevent war. It must be stopped before it begins. Will you please get out of your routine ruts and realize that time is running out—that we all may be dead if this war question isn't solved—once and for all?"

Dr. Hayden glanced helplessly at Dr. Danby.

"He's far too active mentally," he said. "Do you suppose his brain ....?"

"Very abnormal," observed the world's greatest brain specialist. "Better give him some sedatives to quiet him. He'll collapse of nervous exhaustion if you don't!"

Miss Snyder started from the room to get the sedatives prescribed.

"Just a minute, nurse!" called Tom. "Are Mr. Engle and Miss Logan still waiting?"

"I don't know, Mr. Finley," she replied, with an anxious glance at the doctors.

"You know all right but you won't tell me!" perceived her unruly patient. "Don't you dare let them get out of the hospital without seeing me—sedatives or no sedatives. I'm not taking anything, anyway. I've been unconscious long enough!"

"Mr. Finley!" spoke Dr. Danby, "You're not helping your condition by acting this way. You don't seem to realize—you just came out of a most serious operation a few hours ago!"

Tom scorched him with a glance. "And you don't seem to realize, Doctor, that I have serious responsibilities which won't wait—regardless of my condition. If I live just long enough to help straighten things out on Earth, I'll be satisfied."

Miss Snyder re-entered the room with a glass of water and some powder which she handed to Dr. Hayden.

"Here you are," smiled the head of the Los Alamos Hospital Staff. "These will steady your nerves!"

Tom pushed the powders aside and half spilled the water.

"My nerves are all right, thank you! I won't rest easy until you've called back Mr. Engle and Miss Logan. Are you going to do it?"

The two medical men looked at one another.

"If you'll promise to settle down after that?" proposed Dr. Danby.

Tom nodded. "I promise!"

Dr. Hayden turned to Miss Snyder. "All right, tell Mr. Finley's visitors to come in. But only ten minutes, Mr. Finley—no more!" Miss Snyder nodded and left the room.

"No time limit!" ruled Tom. "This isn't *my* life you're playing with, gentlemen—it's the lives of everyone on Earth!"

Dr. Danby, startled, took Dr. Hayden by the arm and turned, with him, toward the door.

"When he gets a little stronger," he said, in a low tone, pitched just beyond the patient's hearing, "it would be well for you to have the head of your psychiatric department examine him. I'm afraid there's still a brain involvement there."

"Yes, Doctor—he's obviously not all here.—Of course, he *thinks* he is—which is characteristic."

The two medical men left the room and Tom was again alone.

"Of all the damned stupidity!" he swore. "First the nurse—and now the doctors! They'll probably tell Bill and Clare that I'm nuts—which won't help matters, either." He put a hand to his bandaged head. "I feel surprisingly good for what I'm supposed to have gone through. Guess they must have left a few brains up there." He fumed some more. "Wonder how long they'll keep me in bed, wearing this turban? I've got to recover—but fast!"

The door opened and the two people Tom wanted to see returned, followed by Miss Snyder.

"Hello," said Tom. "Don't let anyone put you out again till I finish saying what I want to say."

His tone was positive and revealed surprising strength.

"As for you, Nurse—will you please take a powder yourself and leave the room? I'll press the buzzer if I need you."

"Yes, sir!" said Miss Snyder, actually relieved to be dispatched. She glanced apprehensively at her patient as she hastened out the door.

Clare came directly to the bedside and took Tom's hands.

"We didn't want to tire you," she started to explain. "We just happened to be here when you . . . .!"

"That's right," cut in Bill Engle. "You were in a pretty bad way when you first came to . . . a little out of your head." He laughed. "You probably don't remember—but you were trying to tell us you'd been to Heaven and Hell . . . .!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project eyed the Secretary of Defense soberly.

"That's right," he said. "I have been!"

Bill Engle's lower jaw fell open. "You mean—you still believe that?"

"Sit down!" ordered Tom. "You, too, Clare! I know this is fantastic and weird —what I'm about to say—but you'll have to take it on faith because it's too important . . . it has a bearing on our problem here."

TOM'S two visitors pulled up chairs but their facial expressions revealed their misgivings. Neither had a word to say.

The man in the bed studied them before speaking.

"You make a striking looking couple," he said, finally. "Been seeing quite a good deal of each other since I've been

knocked out, haven't you?"

The query came with bombshell unexpectedness, and caught the Secretary of Defense with his defenses down.

"You're pretty good at surmising," laughed Bill Engle. "It so happens that Miss Logan and I have been rather closely associated. You see, Tom, she's been carrying on your work . . . . !"

"I know," said the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project. "I've been around. I've seen what's been going on!"

"You've—what?" Bill Engle stared at him, incredulously.

"My astral body, of course," explained Tom. "Don't ask me how it happened. That's how I got to Heaven and Hell. No time to describe these places now. But I've talked to the Grand Ruler of First Paradise and his Catastrophe Council and they're terrifically worried there about our coming atomic war!"

"You intimated that before," said Clare, gently. "You're repeating what you already told us, Tom—when you first came to. I'm afraid you're still . . . . !"

"No, I'm even wider awake! I remember everything that happened to me perfectly. I was in the company of my Guardian Angel most of the time . . . except during my trip to Hell . . . . !"

"Did you see the Devil?" asked Bill Engle, with a humoring expression.

"I saw the one we call the 'Devil'," Tom reported, earnestly. "The Spirit of Evil."

"Did he have horns?" The Secretary of Defense was smiling, broadly.

"Bill, please!" scolded Clare, in a low voice.

"I'm just trying to snap him out of it," he replied. "The poor fellow's completely gone."

"What did you say?" demanded Tom.

"I said," covered the Secretary of Defense. "Go on!"

"You two don't seem to get the significance of what I'm telling you," said Tom. "We live after death—I know that now— and the world needs to know it. Not only that but there's a regular plan of progress and development for us all. And we don't realize what we're doing to ourselves by killing off hundreds of thousands and millions before their time. This has to stop before Heaven's overcrowded. If it isn't stopped, many humans won't get the training and attention they need—and for lack of this guidance—they'll go to hell!"

There was a moment of awkward silence after Tom's statement. Clare tried to speak but words choked in her throat. Bill Engle finally managed: "Look, Tom, let's say everything you've just told us is true. How are we going to sell that to the world? Who'd believe it? Each human would have to have it demonstrated for himself. You say you've been there—with you it's a conviction—but you can't expect us—or anyone else to—well, you've just gone through a terrific physical ordeal. By tomorrow maybe you'll be yourself again. . . ."

"Wait a minute!" broke in Tom, feelingly. "If I prove to you that I know what's been happening while I've apparently been unconscious, then you'll certainly admit that I haven't been talking through my hat!"

Bill Engle stood up, preparing to leave.

"Don't wear yourself out, Tom. We'll be seeing you soon, old man. Take it easy. Everything's under control."

"Clare, I'd like to see you a few minutes alone," Tom requested, desperately.

"Some other time," evaded the woman he loved, pushing her chair away from the bed and getting up to join the Secretary of Defense. "We'll have to be going now. Don't worry about a thing, Tom . . . just rest your mind."

"The new bomb?" asked the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project. "Are you making it yet? What's the exact war situation?"

"Tell you all about it tomorrow," fenced Bill Engle. "Good night, Tom."

He had Clare by the arm and was piloting her out the door.

"Good night!" she called back, obviously relieved to be departing his presence.

Tom lay quietly for a moment after the two had gone.

"Maybe I made a mistake in coming back to Earth," he said, bitterly. "I don't appear to be getting anywhere!"

CHAPTER XIV

NEWSPAPER reports of world conditions in this highly inflammative period, were censored, but—even so—discerning subscribers could read between the lines,. On some occasions pictures spoke louder and clearer than words.

A cartoonist for the Chicago Tribune came up with a provocative cartoon descriptive of the current world crisis. He pictured Russia and the United States as tight-rope walkers in the persons of their Premier and President, both of whom, heavily armed, were balancing precariously but menacingly on the same wire as they advanced toward one another.

Beneath them was a black and forbidding abyss labelled: "World Oblivion," ready to catch each or both when they fell.

The Premier was dialogued as saying: "I don't know how much longer I can keep this up!" to which the President was frankly replying: "You've got nothing on me—I don't, either!"

The cartoon was captioned: "Everything to lose—and nothing to gain!"

The Secretary of Defense and the woman who had taken over the duties of the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, did not call at the hospital the next day to see Thomas Everett Finley, nor the day after that, nor the day after that.

"Doctor's orders!" was all that his nurses would say when the two callers he expected did not show up.

"Put a radio in here. Get me the newspapers! Let me know what's going on!" he stormed.

"You must be kept quiet," the nurses would reply.

The sessions Tom had with Dr. Hayden and other members of the hospital staff were violent.

"You've no right to keep me out of communication this way!" he protested.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Finley, I'm responsible for your life while you're in this hospital. There was a mistake made in permitting Miss Logan and Mr. Engle to see you so shortly after your operation. That mistake will not be made again."

"But it's the fourth day now!" raved Tom, "and I'm feeling fine! It wouldn't hurt me at all to have visitors. There's something funny about this. Do Miss Logan and Mr. Engle *want* to see me? Are they staying away on your advice or of their own accord?"

"That is unimportant," said the head of the Los Alamos hospital. "You're not to have any company, Mr. Finley—and that ends it!"

Frustrated on every hand, Tom blew out his feelings on each of his three nurses in turn. They took to calling him "the mad man" and freely predicted, when he could be moved, that he'd be taken to the "psychopathic" ward. This prophecy seemed confirmed when Tom was visited, late afternoon of the fourth day, by Dr. Jules Green,

chief psychiatrist. He was a thin little man, with glasses, high cheek-bones, tufted eyebrows, patches of hair above his temples and ears but bald on top.

"Well, Mr. Finley," he greeted. "My name's Dr. Green. I hear you're getting on fine."

Tom glowered at him. "Yes, thank you! Where are you from—and what do you want?"

"Why, I—er—just dropped in to get acquainted, Mr. Finley," said the head psychiatrist, glancing at the chart and checking with papers in his hand.

"Sorry, Doc," said Tom, bitingly, "I'm not permitted any visitors. Come back next week—next year!"

Dr. Green emitted a high-pitched little laugh.

"Ho, ho! Good sense of humor, I feel! . . . Very funny, Mr. Finley!" He approached the bedside, drawing up a chair. "I'm on the staff here, of course. I work with all brain cases."

"In other words," said Tom, "you're a psychiatrist!"

Dr. Green swallowed and glanced about at the red-haired nurse on duty, who gave him a lifted eyebrow.

"Yes, Mr. Finley," said the doctor. "We always examine all patients after brain surgery. Strictly routine, you understand."

Tom glanced. "Oh, yes—undoubtedly. Keeping me confined here without any contact with the outside world is strictly routine, too, I suppose . . . ?"

"Just a necessary precaution," said Dr. Green. "After such a delicate operation, we don't want to take any chances of a possible relapse."

"Bunk!" branded Tom.

MR. GREEN made some notations on his pad. Then he looked up and studied the patient.

"Just relax now, Mr. Finley. I want to have a little talk with you about yourself."

Tom nodded, grimly. 'Shoot! Let's get this over with. What do you want to know?"

Dr. Green tapped the ball point pencil against his teeth. It made an irritating clicking sound.

"Mr. Finley," he asked. "Did you have what you would consider a 'normal boyhood'?"

"Depends on what you call 'normal' . . . ."

'I mean—environment, mother and father, sisters or brothers, playmates, schooling, sports, you know—the . . . er . . . usual . . . .?"

"Oh, yes—small town . . . orthodox mother—New Thought father . . . no brothers or sisters . . . charming girl next door, my own age . . . high school and college majored in physics and in chemistry . . . basketball and football . . . no serious romances—too damned busy with atomic research . . . that's my biggest mistake to date if I was analyzing myself . . . . !"

Dr. Green's eyes gleamed as he made notes.

"You are very concise, Mr. Finley, and very co-operative. Your chart indicates that you've been quite . . . er . . . rebellious . . . but possibly those in charge haven't quite understood . . . .?"

"They haven't understood—*period!*" snapped Tom.

"Well, perhaps I can straighten things out for you," proposed Dr. Green. "Tell me this, Mr. Finley—when you were a boy, do you recall any tendency for day-dreaming? I mean—did you ever go wool-gathering, we'll say—or, that is—did you, at any time have visions or think you saw things?"

Tom eyed the hospital's head psychiatrist sharply. "I see what you're driving at. You're trying to connect up some

possible 'hallucination' in my childhood with the hallucinations I've been reported having since I've regained consciousness here?"

Dr. Green appeared disturbed. "Now, Mr. Finley, you mustn't jump at conclusions. Don't try to interpret my questions. Just answer me, frankly and honestly, if you wish me to be helpful."

"The answer is frankly and honestly 'no'!" said Tom. "Sorry to disappoint you, Doctor. I never saw anything and I never heard voices!"

"I see," said Dr. Green, making further notations. Then, half to himself, as though musing, he added, "In that case, it must be due to the brain injury . . . ."

"How's that?" demanded Tom. I didn't quite hear you."

"Oh, did I say something?" replied Dr. Green, looking up. "Excuse me—I was studying my notes." He pondered a moment. "Now, Mr. Finley—about these impressions you've been receiving . . . that is, the ideas . . . well, your visit to Heaven and Hell . . . I'm most interested to hear, first hand, about that."

"I imagine you are," said Tom. "But it would be a waste of my time. You'd put it all down as a delusion. I shouldn't have mentioned it at all."

"You mean," questioned Dr. Green, "that you can see now—there was no foundation for these thoughts?"

"No," said Tom. "I can see that no one will believe me so I might as well shut up about it."

Dr. Green poised his pencil in midair.

"Mr. Finley," he said, dramatically. "You might be encouraged to know that I am most interested in so-called psychic phenomena. I've attended seances, investigated mediums. Perhaps, if you will take me into your confidence, I can explain what has happened to you."

"I don't need an explanation," said Tom. "I know what happened."

"You know what you *thought* happened," corrected Dr. Green. "When a person has a psychic experience he is not in a position to analyze it. A dreamer thinks a dream is real. So does a hypnotized man believe a snake is attacking him, when given the suggestion. But those who are on the outside, looking on, know it's only in the man's imagination."

TOM shook his head. "No, Doctor, what you say doesn't fit my case. This was different!"

Dr. Green laughed his high-pitched little laugh.

"That's what everyone thinks, Mr. Finley . . . and that's just the difference between . . . . !"

"Someone who's judged 'normal' and someone who's considered abnormal?" finished Tom. "If I accept your explanation of what happened to me—I'm rated as 'normal', is that it?"

"Well," hedged Dr. Green. "I wouldn't quite put it that way, Mr. Finley—but we have certain standards by which we evaluate mental attitudes."

"And determine whether or not a person is sane or insane?" pressed Tom. "I begin to comprehend the nature of this interview, Doctor. If I don't pass this charming little cross-examination with you—I'm headed for the psychopathic ward. I may even be committed."

"You're jumping at conclusions again," said Dr. Green, uncomfortably. "That's a bad fault—Mr. Finley—jumping at conclusions. You seem to have the idea that people are against you."

"Wouldn't *you*, if you were in my place?" demanded Tom.

"Yes," said Dr. Green, making positive notes. "Yes—that's it exactly!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked

the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project.

"If I had a paranoic tendency," said Dr. Green, "a delusion of persecution . . . such as you have just described."

"I haven't referred to any delusions!" raved Tom. "I've just been stating facts. Dr. Hayden and his staff are keeping me under virtual guard. Miss Logan and Mr. Engle haven't called to see me since the first time they were here. You are suspicious of my conduct. The nurses don't know what to make of me. Now if this doesn't indicate that they're all against me, for some reason—what *does* it indicate?"

"Mr. Finley," said Dr. Green, tapping the pencil agitatedly on his upper teeth. "I thought we were going to get somewhere when I started this interview. But I can see now it's going to take longer than I anticipated—considerably longer. We'll have to delve very carefully into your past history. Under the circumstances, it serves no purpose to discuss things further at this time. When you are well enough to be moved, we will resume conversations in my ward." The head psychiatrist stood up, shoved the pencil in a pocket of his white coat, and stepped away from the bed. "Good day, Mr. Finley!"

TWO weeks to the day that the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project had regained consciousness, following the operation to relieve pressure on his brain, Clare Logan received a late night telephone call.

"Hello, is this Clare?"

"Yes! . . . *Bill?*"

Awakened from a sound sleep, her senses were hardly functioning.

"No," said the low voice. "Guess again!"

"Why, I—I don't know!" Clare's pulse began to race.

"You've heard this voice before—many times!"

"No, no! It can't be! *Tom Finley*—where are you?"

"You know very well where I am," said the voice. "In a locked psychopathic ward at the hospital. I've broken into the Chief's office and I'm making this call on his private phone. I may be detected any minute. Clare—I've got to see you! Why have you been staying away from me?"

"Why Tom, I—I've wanted to see you—but the doctors and Bill said . . . !"

"Bill! What's he got to do with this? I'm being held here against my will. I'm okay, Clare—and I'm well enough to be out, convalescing in my own apartment. You can get in to see me if you insist on it. Will you come tomorrow morning?"

"Yes, I'll come," said the woman he loved.

"Don't say you will, if you won't," said Tom. "I've gone through too much here to take that."

"You can depend on my being there," promised Clare.

"Fine—and don't tell Bill or anyone you're coming," warned the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project.

"I won't! See you in the morning!"

"Good! I've got to cut off now—someone's coming!"

The line went dead and Clare sat for a moment in her night robe, suddenly nervous and trembling.

"He certainly sounded sensible enough," she considered. "That doesn't dove-tail with reports that he's never been himself since he came to. Poor Tom! I'll have to see him and judge for myself!"

* * *

As Tom Finley hung up the receiver, there were footsteps behind him.

"Hey, you—what're you doing in

here!" barked a voice. It was Jake, the burly orderly. "Why, Mr. Finley!" he exclaimed, as Tom faced about. "Did you bust in this door?"

Tom nodded. "Not much to it. Just a good shoulder heave. I wish the ward doors could be sprung that easy. I'd have been out of here."

Jake shook his head and set his jaw. "I wouldn't have picked you to do this. I'm goin' to catch hell for this, you know that, don't you?"

"I'm sorry, Jake, but I had to make an important telephone call."

"Oh, yeah? Well, it may cost me my job."

"Don't worry about that. When I get out of here, I'll give you a better job than this."

"That's what they all say," said Jake, dubiously. "Only I don't see many of 'em gettin' out."

"*I'll* get out. Want to bet?"

"Naw!" said the orderly, his voice reeking with disgust and chargin. "To think you'd do this to me when I'm gettin' a new mattress for your bed as a special favor. I ought to give you a few welts."

He made a pass at Tom with the back of a big hand.

"Careful, Jake," warned the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project. "This isn't a state institution. This is a private hospital and the board of governors doesn't like lawsuits."

"Aw, go back to bed before you rouse the whole ward!" ordered Jake. "Me—I'll try to fix this door so no one can tell you forced it!"

Tom smiled. "Good! You do that and I'll keep the night nurse busy. I'm developing a bad toothache."

Jake grinned. "Ted's already busy enough with Number Nine. That's the third fit in two nights. You sure knew when to pull this little break-in."

"Go to work," said Tom, "I'll cover you if you cover me. We're the only two who know about this, so far."

"Okay!" rejoined Jake. "Don't let Ted come back here—till I tip you off this is fixed!"

THE locked door of the Los Alamos psychopathic ward was opened to admit a determined woman.

"I want to be taken to Mr. Finley," she said, showing a pass signed by Dr. Hayden.

"Yes, Miss," said the attendant. "Just as soon as I check with Dr. Green."

"Is the doctor in his office?"

"Yes," said the man nurse. "Just wait inside here and I'll call him."

The ward consisted of a long hall, a few private rooms opening off it, and a large room with twelve beds in the rear. There was a small game room where the patients read and played cards. Some of them, seeing her, stopped, stared and pointed.

"Chicken today," said a wise-cracking younger man. "Not bad, either. Wonder who she's calling on?"

He looked questioningly at the group of ill-assorted individuals who were up and walking about the wards in bathrobes and slippers.

"None of us," said one of them. "Must be calling on that atomic scientist down the hall. Class, eh?"

They watched as Dr. Green emerged from his office and advanced to meet the feminine visitor. At a censuring glance from him, they pretended interest in their own affairs.

"Good morning, Miss Logan," greeted the head psychiatrist. "These aren't visiting hours, you know. Something special bring you here?"

Clare surrendered her pass. "Nothing except that I must consult with Mr. Finley on some matters which have de-

veloped at the Laboratory."

Dr. Green shook his head. "I doubt if he's well enough for that."

"Mentally or physically?" asked Clare, pointedly.

"He's responding fine physically," said the Chief of the psychiatric ward, "but, so far, there has been little improvement mentally."

"Where is he?" demanded Clare.

"He's in the third room on the left," said Dr. Green. "I'll show you . . . !"

"I can find him, thank you," cut in Tom Finley's former associate, starting down the hall. "I want to see him *alone*."

The small statured Dr. Green stiffened. "Very well!" he said, icily, and turned back toward his office.

Clare walked swiftly down the hall to the door indicated. She had to run the gauntlet of curious eyes now directed at her once more, as she rapped on the door.

"Come in!" said a familiar voice.

Tom Finley was up, in the usual hospital bathrobe and slippers, awaiting her. He rose from the only chair.

"Here, Clare—you sit here—I'll sit on the bed," he said, and closed the door after her. "Fine of you to come." He took her hand and held it, momentarily, as he looked into her eyes. "Good to see you!"

"Same here," she replied. "I'd have come sooner—the very next day—but I was told not to—that you were in serious condition."

"Something strange about that," said Tom. "You see me now—how do I look?"

The bandages had been removed, except for a taped over place along the operation scar.

Clare stood off and examined him, critically.

"You look perfectly fine," she said.

"So far, so good," said the Director of the Los Álamos Atomic Project. "Now—next question. Clare—do I look crazy to you?"

"No, Tom—you don't!" she answered, instantly, and with conviction.

"Do I *act* crazy?"

She laughed, a bit nervously. "Well—you haven't—yet!"

He laughed, too, a break in tension.

"Clare," he said, "Have they told you why they're keeping me in here?"

She nodded. "Because you've kept on insisting that your stories of Heaven and Hell and visiting Russia and things like that are true."

"Is that all?" smiled Tom.

Clare looked at him. "Seems to me," she said, slowly, "if you really *do* believe those experiences were real, it would be enough!"

Tom slid off the bed and stood looking down at Clare as her eyes met his.

"Listen, Clare. I'm placed at a terrific disadvantage saying to you what I have to say now. It's just as though the evil forces and every kind of a bad break have conspired against me—to make it impossible for me to help prevent atomic warfare. But if I can convince you, who've experimented with me in tests of our telepathic powers, that something unusual happened to me—something 'out of this world'—while I was unconscious—will you come over to my side and help me fight the greatest battle of my life?"

Clare hesitated. "If you can convince me," she repeated, "yes! . . . But I don't see how you can do it."

There was new light in Tom's eyes. "All right—that's all I ask. You wouldn't give me this chance to prove my statements before. You and Bill walked out on me."

"But, Tom—you'd just come out of the anesthetic—it was no time!" protested Clare. "And besides, I must confess—you did sound pretty whacky!"

"Okay—I'll try to stick closer to Earth for awhile in what I'm going to say," Tom rejoined. "But, first, I want you to realize that I've been held here, incommunicado, since my operation. There has been no possible way for me to get personal information about your doings while I've been at the hospital, has there?"

"None that I can conceive of," said Clare, wonderingly.

"Fine! Then if I give you an account of your own actions—if I can report thoughts and movements to which only you, yourself, can testify, it should indicate to you that I've not been dreaming or imagining things, shouldn't it?"

"It would certainly indicate something," Clare admitted cautiously.

"Good! Then would it surprise you to learn that I attended the investigation the Military Board made the next morning after Dr. Anapol's attack on me—and that I heard you tell your story of how you sensed Androv was up to something that night and that you stuck around just to see what he might . . . !"

"Oh, no!" cried Clare. "How could you have known about this?"

TOM spoke grimly. "It's all indelibly recorded up here!" he said, and pointed to his head. "I can recall it like a motion picture reel—you were wearing a gray suit . . . one I'd never seen you in before—you looked darned attractive I might add . . . I thought so—and Bill Engle thought so—he couldn't take his eyes off you!"

Clare's face colored. "I can't understand . . . !" she gasped.

"In fact, our Secretary of Defense fell for you at that meeting!" continued Tom. "He wouldn't let you get away until he'd told you that he wanted to see you personally before leaving for Washington . . . and he did, too—that very night . . ."

Tom's former Laboratory associate was clutching the chair arms, her fingers turning white under the pressure.

"Dinner—At the Los Alamos Inn," said Tom. "I wasn't there on that occasion, I was visiting Heaven at the time . . . but I knew this was in Bill's mind—I could read it."

"We did eat at the Inn, as you say," said Clare.

"You ate there at a later date, when Bill returned from Washington," recounted Tom, studying her facial expression. "He proposed to you that night—but you held him off. Am I right?"

"Yes," said Clare, weakly, "but how on earth . . . ?"

"If I'd been on Earth, I couldn't have done it," Tom grinned. "I was in my astral body—and I sat in the booth beside you during the entire meal!"

"Tom Finley—you didn't!" charged Clare.

"Those were beautiful roses on the table. I liked the candle light, too."

"I—I don't know what to say!" cried Clare. "I've never heard anything like this—never!"

"I'm sorry," Tom apologized. "I didn't mean to get so personal. Let's skip this for a few minutes and pick up some other happenings. Remember the visit you paid me at the hospital? How you got in by letting them think you were my fiancee?"

Clare leaped to her feet. "This is just too uncanny!" she exclaimed. "I don't know if I can stand to hear more!"

Tom placed hands on her shoulders and looked in her eyes.

"Clare!" he said. "I don't care if no one else in the world believes my story—just so you do! I only wish you *were* my fiancee. You were right in presuming that I cared for you . . . and if this hadn't happened, I'd have eventually

gotten around to proposing. Of course, since Bill's been paying court to you, you may feel differently now—so we won't go into that."

There was a look of awe in Clare's eyes.

"What kind of man are you?" she asked.

"I'm just a damn fool when it comes to romance," said Tom. "But I'll get back to that later." He patted her shoulder. "Clare, don't let this worry you too much. But I was there in the hospital room when you asked the nurse to be alone with me for a few minutes. I heard every word you spoke to me there in the bed. I was standing as close to you as I am now—and I put my arm around you, like this, only you didn't feel it, and I spoke to you but, of course you didn't hear me. But you told me that I'd gotten your 'mental call' at the hospital the night before—which was right, Clare . . . I did. That's what brought me to the office!"

"I knew it!" cried Clare, bursting into tears. "I knew it, Tom! Oh, I'm so glad you've confirmed this. You don't have to tell me more. This is wonderful! . . . This is something stupendous! . . . Far more miraculous than mere telepathy!"

"Wait!" said Tom. "I want you to be sure. I could go on and on . . . but the night I was going to be attacked—I knew what was being planned in advance. My Guardian Angel told me. I had only one chance of saving my earth life—and that was to reach you mentally . . . and I did it, Clare—you got my thoughts—you followed what you felt was a hunch and rushed to the hospital just in time!"

Clare was clinging to him now. They were in each other's arms.

"Tom!" she sobbed. "Everything's been so confused . . . there's been so much happening. I've been under such a strain at the Laboratory. Then, too, Bill's been pressing me personally, as you know. But I've really had you mostly on my mind. I haven't wanted to doubt . . . but I'm convinced now. . . . Nothing can ever shake me. I'll stand by you. . . . I can understand why you wouldn't let them talk you out of your own convictions. But you mustn't try to convince the world, Tom. It's not ready . . . you'll be laughed at . . . ridiculed . . . perhaps put permanently away in some place like this!"

Tom had been listening, thoughtfully. "You're absolutely right!" he said, feelingly. "I can see the newspaper headlines now: 'Atomic Scientist Loses Mind—Thinks There's a Real Heaven and Hell—Has Been Committed to Mental Institution'!"

"That's one story I don't want to read," said Clare. "We've got to get you out of here. I have a dinner date with Bill tonight . . . !"

"Do you have to keep it?"

"I must! From preparations and intimations he's made to me, I'm sure the absolute human limit has been reached. . . . I'm terribly afraid there'll be war in the next twenty-four hours!"

"Not if we can help it!" said the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project. "Just get me out of here!"

"Leave that to me!" Clare volunteered, as they kissed. "But we mustn't let Bill or anyone know, just at present, how we feel about each other!"

"No," Tom agreed, "I can see that wouldn't help."

"Especially since Bill is the man who can free you," said Clare. "He's been depending on Dr. Green's reports. He says he's keeping you confined for security reasons. He's concerned that you might talk out of turn in public in your present mental condition. But if I go to him and tell him I've visited you and

that you haven't said any more about other worlds and that stuff . . . and you seem perfectly sane to me and I think it's a crime to keep you locked up . . . and you're absolutely needed at the Laboratory—I'm sure Bill will order you released."

"He won't," said Tom, a flash of humor in his eyes, "if he learns I really *am* crazy—about *you!*"

They kissed and Clare, breaking away, whispered breathlessly: "Let me go, Tom—if there was ever an eleventh hour in the world—this is it!"

CHAPTER XV

THE heart of the nation, militarily speaking, was the Los Alamos region where stockpiles of atomic bombs were being built up for secret distribution to other strategic centers in the United States and at bases throughout the world.

Atomic weapons were being manufactured at other sites, also, but the hub of operations was in this section, which accounted for the presence of the Secretary of Defense and his military board, rather than in Washington.

It had been freely predicted, in the event of war, that the two capitols of the warring nations—Washington and Moscow, would be wiped off the map in the first few hours of combat. Should this happen, the enemy would not annihilate the top military personnel expected, unless they should just happen to catch them in the city.

Secretary of Defense Bill Engle was in receipt of confidential reports from abroad this particular morning which called for an emergency meeting of the Military Board. In the midst of this session he was handed a note by the guard on duty at the door. Glancing at it, he read:

"Bill—Excuse yourself one moment please. Must speak to you. Urgent. Clare."

Recessing the meeting, Secretary of Defense Engle left the room and found her waiting in the corridor. He motioned her inside an adjoining reception room and closed the door.

"Well, Clare—what is it?"

"It's about Tom," said Clare. "I've just come from the hospital."

"You've seen him?" asked Bill, quickly.

"Had a long talk with him!" said Clare.

"How did you get in?"

"I went to Dr. Hayden and got special permission. Told him it was imperative government business!"

"*Was* it?" The voice of the Secretary of Defense was hard.

"Yes—in a way!" replied Clare, with spirit. "We need him at the Laboratory badly . . . ."

"We don't need a man, however formerly brilliant, who is no longer mentally competent. This is one time, Clare, when I'll have to ask to be excused. Why did you call me out here—just to tell me this?"

"No," said Clare, catching at his sleeve. "Because I'm convinced that Thomas Finley is as sane as we are."

"Does Dr. Green say so?"

"Oh, you know a psychiatrist in his position. He'll play safe every time. But I . . . .!"

"Facts are, Clare—you're not competent to judge. When Dr. Green assures me that Tom is okay, I'll be glad to . . . .!"

"Bill—are you still trying to hold off atomic war?"

The Secretary of Defense tried to pull away. "What possible connection does that question have with Tom Finley?"

"Because—if you are—he can help you do it? . . . .!"

"Listen, Clare—as we're talking, I have it on absolute authority that the Russians have alerted their military forces. Between now and midnight tonight, we are to be hit by long range atomic bomb rockets. Can a thousand Tom Finley's prevent that?"

"Get him out of that hospital at once and bring him into conference with you!" insisted Clare. "That's all I ask. If you don't find him sane—if you see he can't help— then lock him up again —but don't keep a man of his enormous value on the sidelines at a time like this!"

The Secretary of Defense was thoroughly aroused.

"What's Tom been telling you?" he demanded. "How he's arranged for the angels from Heaven to come down and save us?"

"No, no, Bill! You know better than that!"

"All I know is how he was talking that time we saw him. That was enough for me. Once a man cracks like that, he's gone. Up to yesterday he was still claiming that he'd been to Heaven and Hell, according to Dr. Green—and now you tell me he's as sane as we are! What's the matter, Clare—you in love with the guy?"

Bill Engle looked at her searchingly. The retort he received was a body blow.

"What's the matter with *you,* Bill—*jealous?*"

The Secretary of Defense opened the door and stepped out into the corridor. His face was set and unyielding.

"You shouldn't have said that!" he rebuked. "Tom Finley remains where he is until I'm certain of his condition. He and I never saw eye to eye on national defense, anyway. If he hadn't persuaded me otherwise, we'd have attacked Russia weeks ago, and our atomic secrets wouldn't have been stolen or Tom injured. But now, as a consequence, our situation is much more precarious—and I want no obstructionist around to delay necessary action again!"

Without giving Clare opportunity for further appeal or argument, the Secretary of Defense strode away and reentered the conference room. Stunned, hurt and then indignant, the woman who had assumed Tom Finley's duties on the Atomic Project rushed from the building.

HALF an hour later, there was a knock on the door of the Locked Ward in Los Alamos Hospital. Dr. Green, himself, answered, and registered surprise and some irritation at the person who confronted him.

"Miss Logan!" he exclaimed. "Twice in one morning! This is very upsetting to my routine here."

"I'm sorry, Doctor, but it can't be helped," said Clare, stepping in past him. "I must see Mr. Finley again."

The frail sized but energetic Dr. Green took her arm.

"Not quite so fast, please. Do you have another pass from Dr. Hayden?"

"Not this time. I didn't want to bother him."

"Strict orders," declared the head psychiatrist. "No one is permitted in here without authority from the front office." He opened the door into the hospital corridor. "I'll have to ask you to leave!"

The door to Tom Finley's private room opened and the man she was seeking walked into the hall.

"Hello!" he greeted, advancing toward Clare. "You again!"

"Go back to your room!" commanded Dr. Green, in his high, thin voice.

"What's up, Clare?" asked the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, disregarding the order.

"Why, I . . .!" she started. "I've come

for you, Tom—you're going home!"

Dr. Green shut the door into the hall and leaned against it, blocking the way.

"On whose authority is he leaving?"

"He's not committed here," defied Clare. "You can't prevent his going!"

"He's not discharged as cured and he's here by order of the Military," said Dr. Green. "Mr. Finley, I insist that you return to your room!"

"Give me my clothes, Doctor," demanded Tom. "I'm well enough to be out—and this place can't hold me any longer."

Dr. Green raised his voice. "Jake!" he called.

The burly orderly appeared from the store-room and, at sight of Tom, exclaimed: "Giving trouble, is he? I've been spoilin' for a run-in with you, Mr. Finley. What shall I do with him, Doctor?"

"Put him back in his room!" said the head of the Psychopathic Ward.

"With pleasure!" grinned Jake, crossing toward Tom. "Come on, Mr. Finley. Better come along peaceful . . . ."

Clare Logan made a sudden movement with her hand, inside her purse, and a shining object flashed.

"Stop where you are!" she cried.

"Jeez!" Jake exclaimed, backing off. "She's got a gun!"

"Into your office, Doctor," ordered Clare, nodding toward the half-opened door off the hall. "You, too, Jake—or whatever your name is . . . !"

Dr. Green, shocked, hesitated.

"Get moving!" urged Clare, giving a glance down the hall to see if any patients in the ward were observing. She turned her back so they would not see her revolver.

"You can't get away with this!" protested the head psychiatrist, as he followed orders.

"Hurry, you!" said Clare to the slower moving orderly. "I know how to use this. I used to be captain of the woman's pistol team in college!"

This was all the information that Jake needed. Once inside Dr. Green's office, Clare wheeled toward the patient she had come to release. "Tom—tear out that telephone and buzzer system. We're going to give them a taste of a locked ward!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project grinned as he executed her commands.

"What's that over there—a medicine cabinet?" nodded Clare, as she kept Dr. Green and his orderly covered.

"Yes," said Tom.

"See if there's a roll of adhesive in it."

Tom flung the cabinet open. "Yes—here's one!" he said, picking it up.

"Lie on the floor gentlemen—face down, hands behind your back!" directed Clare.

"You're mad, Miss Logan—you'll never get out of the hospital!" protested Dr. Green.

"I'll worry about that! Get down!"

The two men sank to their knees and fell forward on the floor.

"All right, Tom—tape their hands and arms—ankles, too— and you'd better put tape over their mouths!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project ripped off strips of adhesive.

"What crime program have you been listening to?" he asked, as he bound the two victims. "Sorry, Doctor—I know this is a bit undignified . . . but it's quite effective."

THE head psychiatrist tried to make answer but a piece of adhesive tape was clapped over his mouth.

"You'll really get confined for this!" warned Jake.

"Then I might as well make a good job of it," said Tom, and taped the orderly's mouth. "I guess this will keep you both quiet for awhile." He arose and looked about. "Okay, Clare—what next?"

"We're leaving!" said the woman he loved. "Never mind your clothes—come as you are. I've got a taxi waiting . . . . !"

She took the key from the inside of the door and put it in the lock on the outside.

"Good day, gentlemen!"

There was no response as Clare and her bath-robed companion stepped out in the hall, closed the door after them, locked it and took the key.

"Clare—you're wonderful!" whispered Tom.

"I had to do it," she replied, in a low voice, as they slipped out the door of the locked ward into the hospital corridor. "Bill wouldn't grant your freedom till Dr. Green gave the word—and I knew we couldn't get anywhere with him. Time is the essence now! Russia hits us with atom bombs by midnight. That's why I figured it was worth trying anything to . . . . !"

"Right!" said Tom, grimly, "We're out of the ward, but how do we get out of the hospital?"



While Clare Logan held the gun steady in her hand, Tom Finley tore off a long piece of

"That's figured, too!" said Clare. "Here!" She crossed to an empty wheel chair. "Get in this and keep your mouth shut. I'm wheeling you out!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project obeyed instructions. With his head still lightly bandaged, in bathrobe and slippers, he easily passed for any patient.

Clare pressed the button for the self-service elevator, pushed the wheel chair on and descended to the basement.

"Mike, my taxi driver friend is pulled up at the Service Entrance," she informed. "When I roll you out there, leave your chair and jump for the cab. I'll follow."

"Let's hope we don't run into any guards or nurses or Dr. Hayden!" said Tom. "We're doing all right so far!"

But, as Clare opened the elevator door at the basement, Miss Casey, nurse on duty at the Receiving Desk was waiting to enter.

"Well, Mr. Finley!" she greeted, "I didn't know you were going home today!"

"Yes," smiled Tom. "This is *my* day!"

The wheel chair stuck in the elevator as Clare tried to push it out.

"Here, dear, let me help you!" volunteered Miss Casey.



adhesive tape and began to bind Jake's hands behind him. "This will hold you," he said.

She shifted the chair and freed it, helping Clare swing it out onto the cement floor.

"Can you get it up the ramp all right?"

"Yes, thank you!" said Clare.

"Well, good luck, Mr. Finley!" Miss Casey called after them. "Glad you're so much better!"

"So am I!" said Tom, and waved. He gave a low whistle as Clare pushed the wheel chair up the ramp to the street where the taxi was parked. "Close call! But your system is perfect, Clare. Here comes a policeman. Two bits he helps me in the cab."

"Need a hand?" asked the officer, who had been talking to Mike, the taxi driver.

"Would you, please?" Clare smiled pleasantly.

She took one of Tom's arms and the officer the other. Mike held the door and the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project was placed safely in the rear of the cab.

"You're Mr. Finley, aren't you?" recognized the patrolman. "Say, that was a mean attack those commies pulled on you. Sure happy to see you getting out again."

Tom nodded. "Much obliged, officer!"

"Don't mention it!" he beamed, as Mike closed the door and climbed behind the wheel of his taxi.

"Where to, Miss Logan?"

"Mr. Finley's apartment, please."

Mike stepped on the gas and pulled away from the curb. Tom leaned back, glancing admiringly at Clare, as he took her hand.

"Well, you promised to get me out — and you did!" he said. "Any further plans?"

"None," said Clare. "I've done my part — the rest is up to you. Take over!"

"My first move," said Tom, "is obviously to get some clothes on! In this civilization, I can't accomplish much until I do!"

CHAPTER XVI

A QUICK SHAVE and change of clothes in his apartment prepared Tom for action while Clare impatiently waited in the cab.

"Going to see Bill?" she asked, as he hurried out and rejoined her.

"No!" he said. "Can't expect any help from him. He'd probably have me locked up again."

"But that's what I helped get you out for," she protested, "so you could confer with Bill and the Board . . . !"

"That's what I figured on doing," said Tom, "but I've received different instructions . . . "

Clare eyed him, wonderingly.

"Instructions? . . . Who from?"

"My G.A.!"

"G.A.? Who's that?"

"My Guardian Angel!" said Tom, in a low voice.

Clare stiffened. "Are you starting that again?"

"Starting what?"

"Talking about things out of this world!"

"He's not 'out of this world'. He's right here with me," declared Tom, confidently.

Mike, the taxi driver, looked around. "Where to, now, Mr. Finley?"

"The Project!" ordered Tom.

"Right away!" assured Mike.

As the taxi shot off, Tom leaned over and kissed Clare. He was looking well and fresh, save for the white patch of bandage on his head.

"Don't worry, dear — we've got Heaven on our side!"

A frightened look crossed her face.

"Don't talk like that!" she said. "What are you going to do at the Lab?"

"You'll see when we get there!"

"We won't have much time. They'll be after us — soon as Dr. Green gets free . . . !"

"I know," said the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, then added meaningfully: "But they'd better not get too close to us—it might not be exactly healthy!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Clare, quickly.

"I'll explain," said Tom, guardedly, "when we're alone."

* * *

Arrived at the Main Entrance to the Atomic Project, Tom stepped from the cab, helped Clare out, and shoved a bill in Mike's hand.

"Keep the change," he said.

As they turned toward the Gate, they were recognized by the guards.

"Well, Mr. Finley, good to see you back!"

"They say you had a close call, Mr. Finley!"

"Yes, wasn't any time, I guess," said Tom, as the gates swung open to admit Clare and himself. "Military Board still in session?"

"Must be, Mr. Finley – haven't seen any of 'em come out yet!"

Inside the grounds, they took the bus along the winding road to the Laboratory Building. Guards everywhere recognized and hailed the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, welcoming him back.

Locked doors opened to admit the two most prominent scientists in atomic research. It was a field day of greetings for Tom as he walked through the Large Laboratory room, past scores of workers. The building buzzed with news that "the boss" was back on the job.

"Can't stop to talk now!" said Tom, to many. "Got lots to do!"

As he stopped outside the door of his own private office, with Clare beside him, he turned to face associates, still looking at him and calling their salutations.

"Thanks, all of you!" he said. "See you later."

UNLOCKING THE DOOR, he stepped aside to let Clare precede him into the office, which had its own special Laboratory for his private research, adjoining.

"I see you have everything in good order," he observed, slipping the key on the inside of the door and turning the lock.

"What are you doing?" Clare demanded, concernedly.

"I'm going to be extremely busy and I mustn't be disturbed!"

"Tom – what are you up to? What's your plan?"

"Listen and see!"

Tom crossed to the telephone.

"Operator – give me Long Distance, please . . . Long Distance? . . . This is Thomas Finley . . . "

"Oh, yes, Mr. Finley. Nice to hear your voice again. How are you, sir?"

"Fine, thank you. Is this Ethel?"

"Yes, sir – who can I get for you?"

"I want to reach, if I can, Dr. Androv Anapol, in Moscow, Russia . . . "

"Oh! . . . Dr. Anapol . . . you mean . . . ? Yes, of course!"

"He may not be permitted to speak to me – but I wish you'd try to get this call through, person to person, as quickly as possible. It's very important."

"Yes, Mr. Finley – but should I check it, first, through the State Department?"

"What for?"

"Clearance, sir? On calls to Russia . . . "

"No – put it straight through. A man in Cleveland last month picked up his phone and got the Premier of Russia on the line – so why should my call be cleared through the State Department?"

The Long Distance operator laughed.

"Okay, Mr. Finley. I'll go to work on it and report back!"

Clare had seated herself across from Tom's desk and was staring at him.

"What do you hope to accomplish by this?"

"If I can reach Androv I hope to persuade him to co-operate with me in assuring peace between our two countries."

"But — what can *he* or any *one* man do — here or over there?" demanded Clare. "I'm *for* you, Tom — in any possibly workable plan to prevent what is coming, but I . . . !"

The phone cut her short.

"Hello!" said Tom, placing the receiver to his ear. "You have! . . . Good girl!" Then, to Clare: "The circuits are cleared. Moscow's locating Dr. Anapol now. Looks like he's going to be permitted to speak to me. Their curiosity must be aroused. This is a great break! Get on that extension — want you to witness this conversation!"

Clare did as bidden, with obvious misgivings.

"I wish I had more faith in your idea," she said, as they waited.

"I'm acting on a hunch," confessed the man whose duties she had taken over. "This is what my G.A. impressed me to do!"

"How can you be sure?" asked Clare.

"Once you've been in touch with your G.A. as I have," Tom replied, "you can tell by the inner feeling. But you can't force a hunch — you've got to relax mentally and blank your own mind — and wait for the urge to come."

"When did you get this idea?" Clare wanted to know.

Tom smiled. "While I was shaving. I used to get hunches during this time but I didn't know where they came from. You've had hunches from your G.A., too —everyone has—but they haven't realized it!"

Clare sat, unspeaking. She was highly nervous and glanced several times at her wrist watch.

"Dr. Green must have gotten free by now and spread the alarm for us," she said, finally. "They'll locate us here and you'll be . . . !"

Tom motioned for silence.

"I think he's coming on the wire . . . Yes — I'm sure I heard his voice." Then, into the phone: "Hello . . . Hello, Androv?"

There was a prickling moment of silence—then a man's voice, charged with an unbelieving, almost fearful quality.

"Yes — yes — this is Androv . . . "

"Do you recognize me, Androv? . . . This is Tom!"

"Yes — yes I recognize you . . . "

"Androv — I'm calling you because you know me — you've worked with me — and I believe you had confidence in me — as I had in you . . . "

Tom paused but there was no reply.

"Are you there?" he asked.

"Yes," said Androv's voice, tinged with great caution.

"Androv — I remember your saying, just before you attacked me in the office — that there was not going to be another world war because you wouldn't permit it — that this was the reason you were taking our atomic secrets to Russia. Do you recall that?"

ANDROV was again slow in answering. There was the muffled sound of other voices in the background.

"Yes — yes — I made that statement," he said finally. "What's the reason for this call? What are you driving at?"

"Please answer this question," urged Tom, concentrating intently, choosing each word carefully. "Are you still just as interested in helping prevent war between our two countries?"

"Yes, of course!" The reply came quickly, impulsively.

"Then listen to what I have to say, Androv—listen closely . . . !"

"I'm listening . . ."

"Androv—I'm going to tell you something now which will astound you. While I was unconscious, I left my physical body and visited Russia . . ."

"No . . . !"

"You saw me, Androv, during your meeting with the Big Five in the Kremlin. You heard me speak to you. I told you to warn your Premier not to start anything . . . !"

"Yes—yes, that's true . . . but good God, Tom . . . !" There was sudden hysteria in Androv's voice.

Clare was almost equally affected by the suddenness of Tom's startling revelation.

"Androv — I was actually there," he continued, "I can't explain how — but I heard the Premier and members of the Big Five criticize you for not killing me!"

Tom paused to let this information completely register. He listened to the hum of the long distance wires. Then, Androv's voice came through—weak in fibre, bewildered, awed.

"Tom — why are you telling me this?"

"Because I know now that we live after death! I know what we have to face when we die. And I don't want the murder of millions on my soul. I don't think *you* do, either. We absolutely mustn't permit another world war. You've got to help me, Androv — you in Russia and I in America . . . !"

"You realize," broke in the man who had formerly been one of his most trusted associates, "that I've no authority here?"

"Yes," said Tom, "but if you were sincere in doing what you did — thinking it might prevent war—then you've got to find a way . . . !"

"All right," promised Androv, quickly. "I'll do what I can . . . "

"Good! But you'll have to move fast. We know Russia plans to attack us by midnight tonight. This means we'll attack Russia perhaps before then . . . Tell your Premier . . . !"

"Just a minute!" Androv's voice was charged with excitement. There was a murmur of voices in Russian, then Androv again, on the wire, "Hello, Tom . . . !"

"Yes . . . ?"

"The Premier's been listening in on this call. He instructs me to ask you — are you talking officially or for yourself?"

"For myself!" said Tom, "As head of the Atomic Project here and as a scientist who knows that war, this time, means the end of everything. All government agencies have failed. Unless we do something, as human beings, on a man to man basis . . . !"

"The Premier wants to know what guarantee can Russia have that you won't attack if we don't?"

"Tell him — only our word against yours. Treaties mean nothing these days. If our word and your word means nothing, too, then we might as well destroy ourselves because there'll be no hope for the world, anyway . . . !"

"Hold the phone," said Androv.

Clare exchanged glances with Tom as both waited, tensely.

"I apologize for my skepticism," she whispered. "This is incredible — but it *might* work!"

"Hello . . . Tom!" said Androv's voice. "Can you keep things in line there till I call you back?"

"I'll do my darnedest!" said Tom.

"So will I!" said Androv. "And if I don't succeed, I'll die trying . . . !"

THE connection was suddenly broken. Tom put the receiver down, slowly, staring thoughtfully into space.

"What did you make of his last remark," asked Clare, hanging up on the extension phone.

"Very strange!" pondered Tom. "'If I don't succeed, I'll *die* trying . . . ' Perhaps he was attempting to get something across to us. I think, Clare, he was on the level — I've felt somehow, he's disappointed in conditions and attitudes

he's found in Russia . . . and I believe, if it's at all possible . . . well, at any rate, there's a slight ray of hope . . . !"

"This much done," prompted Clare, "what's your next step?"

Tom lowered his head in his hand and remained silent for a moment. When he looked up, Clare could see that he had the answer.

"I'm by-passing Bill Engle and the Military Board," Tom announced. "I'm talking direct to the President! We must hold off any possible attack on Russia until I hear from Androv!"

"Is that your G.A.'s suggestion?" asked Clare, in all seriousness.

Tom nodded as he took up the receiver. "Some day humans will learn to pay attention to 'the voice within' ", he said, "I'd have thought this was all bunk before my own experience." Then into the phone. "Long distance, please . . . Hello, Ethel — this is me again."

"Yes, Mr. Finley . . . ?"

"Get me the President of the United States this time . . . "

"Okay, hold the line!"

"Want to listen in again?" asked Tom, pointing to the extension.

Clare took up the receiver. "Mr. Finley," she said, admiringly. "It's a thrill to be here with you. I only wish there was something I could do!"

"Knowing that you're with me is doing a lot," was Tom's reply, as he reached over and gripped her hand. "But you may change your mind before I'm through."

"I doubt it," she said.

"Hello, Mr. Finley," spoke the Long Distance operator. "The President's in a conference. Will you talk to his secretary?"

There was a moment's delay. Then: "Yes, Mr. Finley. This is Miss Jamison, Sorry — but the President . . . !"

"I must speak to him, Miss Jamison. Our national security may depend upon this call. Will you put me through to him, please . . . ?"

"He left orders not to be disturbed for any . . . !"

"This can't wait. I'll take all responsibility . . . !"

"Very well — just a minute, please."

Tom smiled at the woman he loved, observing her to be sober-faced.

"Relax, Clare — we're doing everything we can . . . !"

"I'm on edge," she admitted. "I have a feeling that we . . .!"

There was a sudden knock on the door.

"That's it!" she said. "Here's where our trouble starts . . . . !"

"Answer the door, but don't unlock it!" ordered Tom. "Find out who it is. Tell them I'm busy on some secret work . . . can't admit anyone just now."

Clare crossed to the door.

"Yes, who is it?" she asked.

"It's Jim Dalton, Los Alamos police chief . . . and Fred Baylor, head of the Military Police," said a deep voice. "We want to speak to Mr. Finley."

"Sorry, gentlemen — you'll have to wait," Clare called. "He's doing some special work."

"How long will he be in there?" demanded the voice.

"I can't exactly say," replied Clare. "You can't ever tell about this kind of work. . . ." She glanced questioningly toward the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project who gestured as he answered the phone.

"Hello? . . . Mr. President!" said Tom, guardedly. "This is Tom Finley. This is of top importance. I've just talked with Dr. Androv Anapol in Russia—the man who stole our atomic secrets . . . ."

"You have? . . . How'd you get him on the line?"

"Just took a chance—and they put him on."

"What did you call *him* for?" The President's voice had an acid tone.

"Because I had a feeling . . . Mr. President, I've reason to believe what I've said to him may cause Russia to change her plan to attack us."

"Doesn't make so much difference now whether they do or not. Have you been in touch with Engle? Why are you calling me about this?"

"Mr. President—I've not seen or talked with Mr. Engle since the day of my operation at the hospital. I'm calling you direct as Commander-in-Chief of our Armed Forces to ask that you hold up any scheduled attack of ours until I hear back from Russia."

"I appreciate your concern, Finley—but what right have you to make such a request?"

"Because I've promised Premier Karlinski, through Dr. Anapol, that I'd do my utmost to get my country to postpone action if Russia would do the same."

"Since when are you shaping government policy and speaking as our authority?"

"Mr. President—I am going all out, as a scientist, to stop atomic warfare—and I'm going to fight to the last to do it. This is still a war of nerves. I may get a call back from Dr. Anapol any minute, offering assurance that Russia will hold off, if we do. But whoever drops the first atomic bomb starts something that can't be stopped. I beg you, Mr. President—you've held off this long under tremendous pressure—hold off just a little longer and we may be able to reach a peaceful settlement!"

THE President's reply was direct, carrying a tone of annoyance. "This question, Finley, is in the hands of Secretary of Defense Engle and his Military Board. They've just made known to me their decision and I intend to put the entire resources of this government behind carrying it out. We've placated Russia beyond the limit of endurance. I'm in conference on this matter right now. I'll thank you to report to Mr. Engle and place yourself under his orders. Don't try to do the work of the State Department. Stay in your field of atomic science where you've been and can be of great value. Good day!"

Tom dropped the receiver in place and gave his attention to Clare who was still talking through the door.

"No, Mr. Finley can't leave what he's doing. Do you care to tell me what you want to see him about?"

"We want to see you, too," said the voice. "Open up. We'll talk to you!"

The door knob rattled.

"Sorry—I've got to go back to the Laboratory and help Mr. Finley. We'll be out when we're through, gentlemen. You'll just have to wait!"

Clare retreated from the door toward Tom who slipped an arm about her.

"What shall we do?" she whispered. "I don't think they'll break in. They know our only exit is through the big Laboratory room. How'd you make out with the President?"

Tom shook his head. "I got a dressing down for going over Bill's head. He referred me back to Bill and intimated pretty definitely that we're on the verge of war. I'd say within the next few hours at the most."

"Maybe you'd better try to reach Bill?"

"I'm not leaving this office. If he once gets his hands on me, our chances of stopping this war are finished."

Clare nodded. "I'm sure you're right. Okay, we'll fight it out here, if it takes the rest of the day."

"It's apt to get pretty rough," warned Tom.

"I'll still stick!" said Clare.

The phone rang and both glanced toward it, hopefully.

"If that's Androv," guessed Tom. "He's got good news!" But it wasn't Androv, as was evidenced at once by the expression on Tom's face as he motioned Clare to get on the extension.

"Yes, Bill? . . . What's on your mind?"

"You know damned well what's on my mind!" raged the Secretary of Defense. "I don't have enough to do at a terrific time like this—to have to worry my head about you. What in hell do you mean phoning that traitor Anapol in Russia and making a dicker with him—and then calling the President and asking him to hold up our military plans? You're absolutely crazy, Tom. I thought so when I talked to you at the hospital . . . and Clare's crazy, too, doing what she did to get you out! . . . Is she there now? If she is—put her on!"

Tom signalled to the woman he loved to answer and Clare spoke into her phone.

"Hello, Bill!"

"Clare—what in sam'hill's gotten into you? You're dealing with a mad man. Can't you see it by now? He's lost his reputation and you're on the way to losing yours. I thought you had a better head on you than this! Is he holding you there?"

"No," said Clare, "I'm here of my own free will."

"The police report that you won't let them in!"

"Why should I? They just want to arrest us both."

"You'll get off easy. I'll see to that. They're just after Tom. He'll really be put away this time!"

Clare flashed a glance at the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project who had heard every word at his phone.

"Bill!" Tom cut in. "I'm waiting here for a call from Russia. Androv has promised to phone back. He's trying to influence the Premier to delay action . . . and I've told him that we wouldn't . . . .!"

"You fool! He'll never call back— and while you're waiting—and we're waiting—their atom bomb rockets will start dropping on us! I'm beginning to think you're pretty red yourself! You want to make sure we don't attack until Russia . . . .!"

"That's a lie!" branded Tom.

"Then come out of that office—give yourself up to the officers and go back to your bed at the hospital. You're not at all well, Tom—and you don't realize it. You're kicking up a hell of a fuss here—making an ass of yourself. I've got to be taking a plane to Washington inside an hour. I can't be wasting my time and energy on you!"

"I'm waiting on the call from Russia," Tom repeated, quietly. "As soon as I know whether the word is favorable or unfavorable, I'll come out—not before."

"Then, by thunder, I'll have to order the police to come in and get you!" threatened the Secretary of Defense.

"I'd advise you not to try that!" warned the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project.

"I'm coming over myself!" raged Bill Engle. "I'll run you out of there in a hurry!"

He banged down the receiver.

"Well," said Clare, as Tom sat, head bowed for a moment, "I guess it won't be long now. You tried, dear—but it was a long shot, phoning Dr. Anapol. The whole thing is so utterly futile. We're living in a world that's mad . . . no wonder we're a little mad ourselves . . . I wish there was some place on this globe we could go and get away from it all . . . I don't dare think of what's going to happen . . . .!"

TOM leaped to his feet. "It's still not going to happen!" he cried. "I'm not through yet. I'll force Bill Engle to hold off attack. I'll compel him to wait until we know positively that the slightest possible hope for peace is gone!"

Clare stared at him, helplessly. "How are you going to do that?" she asked.

"Come here!" said Tom, leading the way into his private laboratory, part of the office suite. "I'll show you!"

Clare followed, wonderingly, and saw Tom kneel before a huge vault, working the combination. The heavy doors came ajar, revealing large compartments. Reaching in, Tom lifted out some metallic devices about the size of small suitcases, and fitted them together. He slipped a pin in place and adjusted a mechanism as Clare watched him in growing horror.

"Here you are," he said. "Here is the new atomic bomb—the live model I, myself, put together from the parts I had tooled. It's the bomb being made from blueprints in the plant. When I remove the pin now—it will explode."

"What are you going to do with it?" asked Clare, a hand to her palpitating throat.

"If they attempt to break in on me—I'll warn them that I'll pull the pin!" he said.

Clare suppresed a shriek. "Tom—I—I believe you *are* mad!" she cried.

"Either I see this through or I don't," he replied, carrying the atomic bomb out and placing it on his desk. "My death will be as nothing compared to the millions of lives which may be saved—if war can still be prevented."

"But you'll kill others—hundreds on the Project grounds—in Los Alamos—no telling how far distant . . . and you'd kill me, too!"

Tom shook his head and reached out his hand, turning on the loud speaker system.

"No Clare—I'm not asking you to stay with me from this point on. I'm giving everyone a chance to get away to safety—in the event anything like this should happen."

There was a humming sound as the loud speaker system warmed up, ready for use. Tom snapped his fingers in front of the microphone on his desk and listened to the sound reproduction.

"I guess it's ready," he said. "Listen to this announcement! . . ." Lowering his face on a level with the microphone, he raised his voice as Clare looked on in horrified fascination. "Attention—all associates, employees, guards and all at work on the premises of the Atomic Project wherever you are." His voice could be heard booming through the large Laboratory room and outside on the grounds. Director Thomas Finley speaking! This is a danger warning—danger! Everyone leave the Project at once! It is hazardous to remain in this area. Leave your work immediately and get away from the Project grounds. Tell the citizens of Los Alamos to vacate the city. Twenty miles should be a safe distance. There is danger of an atomic bomb explosion. Don't stampede—but don't delay! Get going at once!"

There were excited, unbelieving cries outside in the large Laboratory and a shuffling of feet toward the exit doors at the far end, away from Tom's office. His door shook and fists pounded on it.

"Finley!" shouted a voice. "This is Police Chief Dalton! . . . What are you trying to pull in there! Let us in or we'll break the door in!"

"Get away from that door and get out of the building!" called the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project. "I'm sitting here with my hand on the pin of an atomic bomb. The first blow you strike on that door—I'll pull the pin!

If you want to save the lives of everyone in the Project—get out and leave me alone!"

"But, Finley. . . .!" protested the voice.

"Get out!" warned Tom.

There followed the sound of retreating footsteps. Looking out the window, Clare could see workers streaming from all buildings and running toward the Gate, casting anxious glances toward the building where the Director's office was known to be. A siren in the distance commenced sounding. Fire bells started ringing. The town of Los Alamos was being alerted. Pandemonium was breaking loose.

Clare fumbled in her purse and brought out her revolver.

"Drop it!" Tom commanded,

"You're bluffing!" she cried, "You wouldn't dare . . . .!"

HIS fingers closed over the pin on the bomb. There was a look in his eyes which she had never seen before. The gun clattered to the floor and Clare sank, sobbing, into a chair.

The phone began ringing.

"Answer that," commanded Tom.

Clare picked up the extension receiver.

"Hello!"

"Clare!" cried Bill's voice. "My God—what's Tom up to? Is his warning on the level?"

"Yes—he's sitting here with the bomb on his desk right now!"

"Are you with him on this?"

"No—I'm not!"

"Can't you get away?"

Tom, hearing Bill's loud and excited voice as it burst from Clare's receiver, grabbed his own phone and spoke into it.

"She is free to go or stay as she chooses. Nothing will happen if you let me alone—and if you hold off any planned attack on Russia until you hear from me. I can keep track of what's happening on my radio. It may be a few hours yet before I get a phone call from Russia—but I'm going to wait it out, just in case . . . .!"

"You won't be getting any phone call," said Bill. "The telephone exchange in Los Alamos is closing and its employees are taking to the country along with everyone else!"

"Better advise them to connect me up, before they leave, with a direct line to Albuquerque or Sante Fe or some other exchange so I can get my Russian call," said Tom, "if it comes through."

"All right!" snapped the Secretary of Defense. "But *you'd* better give up before too long—or we'll be obliged to come in after you, regardless!"

"You won't do that," Tom rejoined, with confidence. "This Project means too much to our atomic warfare! Stand by at a safe distance and do nothing—if you know what's good for you!"

"Tom—for God's sake—snap out of it!" pleaded Bill Engle, trying a different approach. "You've really put the fright in people around here! You're going to have a lot to answer for!"

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project was unmoved.

"Not if this war doesn't come off! That's what I'm gambling on. It's my life against the possible saving of a hundred million. Attack Russia without my consent and I blow up this Atomic Project. Hold off until I leave this office of my own free will—and nothing happens. This is your choice, Bill! What's it going to be?"

"I'm not making any promises to a crazy man. Clare, if you're still on the wire—for heaven's sake get out of there while the getting's good. Looks to me like anything's apt to happen any time!"

"Are *you* leaving?" Clare asked.

"Certainly I'm leaving! No sense in needlessly risking my life—or your doing it, either!"

The Secretary of Defense broke the connection.

"Well," said Tom, looking at Clare, quietly. "Everyone else has gone now. How about you?"

The woman he loved didn't answer. She simply sat across the desk from him, apparently close to nervous exhaustion. Tom reached over and turned on the radio.

A dance band number was suddenly cut off in the midst of a selection and an excited announcer's voice said:

"We're interrupting this program to bring you a special news flash . . . !"

"Ladies and gentlemen!" addressed a commentator. "A most astounding and horrifying thing has happened. The Los Alamos Atomic Project, the city of Los Alamos and all surrounding territory are being evacuated in fear of a great atomic explosion! Thomas Finley, Director of the Project, escaped from the hospital where he was recovering from brain surgery, has barricaded himself in his office with Miss Clare Logan, famed woman scientist, and has threatened to blow up the Project with one of his newly developed atomic bombs if any attempt is made to rout him out—or if the United States should start war against Russia. Mr. Finley has the fanatical belief that he, personally, can bring about peace between the two countries! . . ."

Clare had raised her head and was thoughtfully staring into space. Tom had leaned back and was listening intently.

"He reports that he has phoned his former associate, Dr. Androv Anapol in Moscow," the commentator continued. "This is a man who attacked him some weeks ago and stole secret atomic bomb information. But Mr. Finley, acting on some strange, unexplained impulse, has appealed to Dr. Anapol to use his influence in trying to persuade Russian leaders against launching atomic war against us—promising that we would postpone any plans of our own until he should get a "yes" or "no" reply from the doctor.

"Meanwhile, at Mr. Finley's warning, all Project employees, citizens of Los Alamos and nearby residents are streaming into the desert and hills until the threat of the mentally unbalanced scientist is ended. . . .

"Stand by, ladies and gentlemen, for more reports on later developments . . . . !"

THE voice cut off and dance band music resumed. Tom turned the radio down to background volume.

"Extremely accurate reporting," he observed. "This should give every American citizen something to think about. You haven't answered me, Clare. Are you leaving? You'd better go quickly because I honestly can't predict what may happen."

Clare shook her head. "I'm all right now. I'm over my big scare. I can think again—and it's given me a new perspective. You're one man against the world, Tom Finley! Everything's so terribly cockeyed today—nothing seems to make sense—it seems ridiculous—outrageous—few would understand—but maybe a person like you *has* to be crazy to restore the world to sanity! Who knows? . . . I don't want to live in a warring world . . . I probably wouldn't live long, anyway . . . so I'm staying, Tom—to the finish!"

CHAPTER XVII

WORLD capitols became a hubbub of excited speculation at

news of the drama unfolding at the United States Los Alamos Atomic Project. The terrorizing incident stressed in mass consciousness the potential threat to civilization of the atomic bomb. The fact that a man and woman literally were defying the combined United States military forces in holding out for possible world peace, pointed clearly and soberly to the possible wrong use of atomic power by unstable individuals or misguided rulers.

If a small minority, armed with the atomic bomb as a weapon or a threat, could control or terrorize large populations and strong nations, then it boded ill for the future.

With the two scientists, Thomas Finley and Clare Logan refusing all appeals to give themselves up and desist from their threatened destruction of the area in and around Los Alamos, hours passed during which no humans dared venture within the territory which might be blasted.

The desert and surrounding hills were peopled with men, women and children, many of whom had carried with them by car, truck, wagon or cart, such precious belongings as they could snatch up or throw into a conveyance at the time of the warning.

The Los Alamos Disaster Committee had gone into action, removing by ambulance and auto those humans who were ill or handicapped and had no means of aiding themselves. This serious displacement of citizenry had caused little hardship but great inconvenience—and the long, suspenseful wait, as nothing happened, began to get on nerves.

"That feller's bluffin'!" declared a hardy Los Alamos resident. "If the police don't dare go after him, we ought to get up a strong-arm group an' do it! His mind may have snapped but he'll never explode a bomb. He's just sittin' in there with that woman—enjoyin' all the devilment he's stirred up . . .an' I've a suspicion he'll keep sittin' till we get up our nerve to bust in an' nab him!"

This feeling commenced to be shared by other impatient men and women who resented having been chased from homes and places of business.

"Better go slow!" counselled a more cautious head. "He's told us he wouldn't blow the place up so long as we let him alone—or didn't cross him in any way. If we try to force him or out-wit him, he may let her go. Remember, we're not dealing with a sane human being!"

Dr. Green, Chief Psychiatrist for the Los Alamos Hospital, consulted by Secretary of Defense Bill Engle, was asked point-blank if he would venture approaching his former patient.

"You might be able to psychologize him," suggested Engle. "You understand cases like this. What can we expect from an individual in this state of mind?"

Dr. Green was not encouraging. "He's developed into the most dangerous type of schizophrenic," he said, "from which we can expect anything at any time. You might fly a plane over and drop an ordinary bomb on the building in the hope of liquidating him and eliminating the peril . . . ."

"Yes—and killing an innocent woman," said the Secretary of Defense.

"She's not so innocent," charged Dr. Green. "By her own confession to you, she's staying there of her free will."

"I'll never believe it," denied Bill Engle. "I think she was compelled to make that statement."

"She wasn't compelled to pull that gun on me," Dr. Green reminded. "She engineered that entire episode. I'm afraid you have too much sympathy for her, my dear Secretary!"

"Well—we're not sending any planes over—at least not for awhile yet," de-

clared Bill Engle. "If he's as dangerous as you say he is—if he heard their motors, he might suspect some such strategy and explode the bomb!"

"One thing certain," said Dr. Green, with feeling. "If he finally comes out of his own volition, he should be put under heavy lock and guard. With his scientific knowledge, he's infinitely more dangerous to society than an ordinary unintelligent mental case!"

"I agree with you," said the Secretary of Defense. "This is one hell of a note—to think that *one* man can upset the timing of a whole military operation. I wouldn't have believed it!"

INSIDE the office of the Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project, a man and a woman were seated, listening to the radio, playing cards and munching on chocolate bars. It was nearing late afternoon.

"Good thing I had a sweet tooth and this stock on hand," said Tom.

Clare smiled in an attempt to cover her tense feelings, then laid down her hand.

"Tom, it's no use. I can't play any more. My mind isn't on the game. How much longer are you going to wait? What do you feel now? Isn't it possible Androv has double-crossed you? That he's not going to call back—or that they've prevented him from phoning?"

Tom got up and paced about his office.

"I don't know what to think," he said, gravely. "I haven't had a hunch during all this time—just a persistent feeling that Androv was doing all he could—I can't feel that he's tricked me . . . ."

He threw himself down on the sofa and stretched out. It was growing dark and Clare moved to turn on the light.

"No, Clare—leave the light off, please. Let me relax here a few moments," Tom requested.

"But this place is uncanny," said Clare, shuddering. "Not a human within miles of us—everything abandoned. And this bomb—this thing we've labored so many years to perfect—to make so hideously destructive—looks so ominous. Sometimes it seems that life on this planet has been a nightmare and that we'll wake up, one of these days, and find ourselves in a world where wars and bombs have never been heard of . . . .!"

Tom, punching a pillow in place, shook his head.

"That would still be a dream," he said. "The real cold facts are—we've got to fight to rise above the animal in us . . . not only here but in the next existence, too. . . . Death doesn't transform us into something we never were on Earth. It just gives us an opportunity for further development under better surroundings, that's all. I know—*I've been there!*"

Tom closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath. Clare, walking to the window, looked out on the bare Atomic Project grounds. Beyond the walls, buildings, now dimly visible, had no lights in them. In a few minutes it would be totally dark—a ghost area and, some miles away, a ghost town! Sooner or later, if Tom continued to hold out, some humans would risk their lives to break in and overpower him. No mad man could be permitted to tie up a territory like this for too long and seriously check-mate a government's decision to make war before it was warred upon.

A sudden thought struck Clare. Her revolver lay on the desk where she had placed it, after taking it from the floor. Tom had made no effort to protect himself against her possible use of it, following her announced decision to re-

main with him. He was trusting her implicitly. But might it not be for his best good if she compelled him to surrender, in case there were no significant developments in the immediate future? Clare's hand reached out for the revolver and pulled it toward her. She fingered it, speculatively. Much as she loved and admired this man who yearned so fervently for peace that he had committed this most fantastic of all acts—there was a human limit to her loyalty and endurance. She could so easily have him entirely at her mercy. He was not even near the bomb, having let down his guard completely. Should he resist—she could shoot, in self defense, and no court on earth would ever hold her responsible. Instead, she would be heralded for her heroic act in saving an entire community from possible destruction at the hands of a man everyone would judge insane. Dead or alive. Thomas Everett Finley would be rewarded as mentally unbalanced. Perhaps he was—in a logically illogical sort of way . . . What should she do?

Clare picked up the revolver. As she did so, Tom stirred, opened his eyes and stared straight ahead of him toward the foot of the sofa.

"Androv!" He sat upright, still staring. "What are *you* doing here?"

Clare, startled, dropped the revolver on the desk and followed Tom's gaze, but she saw nothing.

"No—oh, no!" grasped Tom, rocking from side to side and groaning in anguish.

Clare, running to him, sank on her knees beside the sofa and placed an arm about him.

"Tom!" she cried. "Tom, dear—you've had a bad dream! Wake up!"

Dazedly, Tom rubbed his eyes. "Didn't you see him? . . . Didn't you see Androv?"

"No," said Clare, trying to be calm. "You must have been dreaming. No one was here."

"But I *saw* him! He told me the Russians wouldn't alter their war plans so he just blew up their atomic laboratories!"

"But I didn't see Androv," Clare repeated. "I looked where I saw you looking, Tom, and there was nothing there. I didn't hear his voice. All I heard was yours. Don't you suppose, dear, that your nerves . . . couldn't this be wishful thinking? . . . You've been under such a strain . . . You've wanted something to happen to prevent war . . . and you've imagined the one thing that could do it . . . then you dropped to sleep and had this dream . . . .!"

"It wasn't a dream!" cried Tom. "You'll hear about this! . . . It's too big to keep inside of Russia!"

HE pulled her to him and kissed her but Clare, badly shaken, reached for the lights.

"I can't stand it any longer in the dark! I hope you're right, Tom, for your sake—for all our sakes. But this is just too incredible . . . .!"

"You'll see!" Tom insisted, returning to his desk and seating himself in front of his atomic bomb. "It won't be long now—you'll see!"

The phone rang and Clare jumped, nervously.

"Hello!" said Tom.

"Is your radio on?" cried Bill Engle's frenzied voice, so loud that it vibrated in the room.

"No," Tom replied.

"Then get this—we've just had news from abroad—Russia's atomic project has been blown up with fearful loss of life!"

"Oh, no!" shrieked Clare. "Oh, Tom!"

The Director of the Los Alamos

Atomic Project took the news quietly. "Yes, I knew about it," he said, "Androv was just here and told me."

"Androv?" Bill's voice almost broke. "What are you talking about? How could he have been here?"

"You'll have to believe me, Bill—Clare can testify—Androv *was* here—he's dead, of course—he informed me he's blown up the project himself!"

The Secretary of Defense was momentarily incoherent.

"Well," he said, recovering, "whether he did or not, there's no more danger of our being attacked by Russia. But now we're going in there and finish the job—destroy the Russian menace for all time . . . . !"

"Do you mean you're not going to send all possible human aid?" demanded Tom. "That you're going to hit a country when it's already down?"

"My dear fellow—Russia would have jumped on us if our Atomic Center had been destroyed . . . . !"

"Listen, Bill—Androv didn't give his life to enable us to attack Russia—he did it to help prevent war—and he was counting on me to do my part. That's why I've done what I did to make sure we wouldn't . . . . !"

"Don't let that worry you, Tom," broke in the Secretary of Defense. "You've rendered your country a real service by putting Androv up to this—I'll recommend you're let off with a light sentence for what you've done today . . . . !"

Tom turned to Clare who had taken a stand beside him.

"Do you hear what he's saying?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Is whatever I decide to do all right with you?"

"It's all right," she said, with a composure and resignation which surprised her.

Bill's voice again came over the wire. "It's okay for everyone to return to their homes, isn't it? Danger's all over?"

"No, it's not!" said Tom. "I can see now that the only way to prevent Man from destroying himself is to destroy the weapons Science has made for him. Keep this territory clear, Bill—we don't want to take anyone else with us."

"What kind of talk is that? . . . You don't mean it . . . you can't . . . . !"

"Check your watch with mine—I've got exactly ten to seven," said Tom, slipping an arm about Clare. "At seven o'clock there'll be no more Los Alamos Atomic Project . . . . !"

"Clare, if you're listening," appealed Bill, frantically, "stop him! Talk him out of it!"

"No, Bill," she said. "You can put us both down as crazy—but the people of the Earth need to be freed of this terrible fear that they're going to be annihilated—so they can live normal, happy lives. Of course they can be killed by other forms of warfare—gas, bacteria, sound waves—but, at least, they won't be destroyed by atomic bombs which we helped make . . . and maybe they'll wake up after this happens—and really outlaw war! . . . ."

"Five minutes to seven!" Tom announced, quietly. "We're ringing off. Bill . . . So long!"

"Tom . . . Clare!" shouted the Secretary of Defense as his voice was cut off.

The Director of the Los Alamos Atomic Project put down the receiver and placed his right hand on the pin in his atomic bomb. Then, looking tenderly down at Clare he asked: "Are you ready?"

"Ready!" she said, in a voice that was firm and sure.

He bent his head and pressed his lips to hers.

There was a stupendous flash of light —then—darkness . . . .

"WELCOME back!" said a familiar voice.

Tom Finley opened his eyes and looked around.

"Oh!" he said. "Hello! . . . That mist again . . . I can hardly see. Where's Clare?"

"She'll be along in a few minutes," smiled the man in white. "She's just getting acquainted with her G.A."

A waiting figure stepped forward through the gray atmosphere and held out his hand.

"Androv!" cried Tom. "I was hoping I'd see you!"

They shook hands, feelings beyond words. As they did so, the entrancing form of a woman came toward them.

"Tom?" she inquired, a bit dazedly. Then, excitedly: "Androv—you, too!"

The three joined hands in greeting.

"There's an Earth broadcast coming up you might like to hear," broke in Tom's G.A. "Tell the others!"

"Listen!" said Tom.

And, as if coming from a great distance, a radio reporter's voice could be heard . . . .

"Ladies and gentlemen—the Los Alamos Atomic Project is no more. In one of the greatest explosions of all history, which produced earth tremors from coast to coast, one of the new atomic bombs was touched off by Director Thomas Finley who developed it—and he and his associate, Clare Logan, were blown into oblivion. A great fire is raging, out of control, where once was the greatest concentration of scientific equipment and atomic weapons.

"By a modern miracle, thanks to a previous warning issued by Director Finley, all humans in the vicinity were given opportunity to get to places of safety. Some were about to return to their homes as the great atomic blast occurred.

"Thus, within the span of several hours, Russia and the United States have been deprived of their atomic bomb centers through the action of scientists who have preferred to destroy their own creations in the fervent hope that this would prevent these weapons from destroying Mankind.

"Whether or not their acts will lead to the desired peaceful settlement of international differences is difficult as yet to predict—but this much is certain—there will be no war for some years between the present two great powers—Russia and the United States.

"Because of these frightful explosions, a tremendous public clamor against war has risen and, out of this clamor government authorities detect a developing will for permanent peace . . . .!" The radio voice faded rapidly and was gone.

"Well, things are temporarily better on Earth, anyway," said Tom. "I guess that's as much as we could hope for . . . .!"

"Come on," urged the man in white, tugging at Tom's arm, "we've just received a message over our G.A. network. You folks are wanted in First Paradise. Take hold of our hands, please!"

Tom, grinning, turned to Clare and Androv. "Get ready for a free ride," he said. "I'll be seeing you both—in *Heaven!*"

DE WYCK'S CLOCK

By H. R. STANTON

IN THE middle ages much of the time of inventors and early scientists was devoted to the study of how man measured time. One of the famous clock makers of the 14th century was Henry De Wyck. In 1379 at the command of Charles V, then King of France, he constructed the weight driven clock which kept accurate time as late as the nineteenth century. It may be seen today boused in the tower of the Palals de Justice in Paris.

It was difficult for a weight driven clock to keep accurate time for it was found that as the weights dropped the speed of the clock increased. De Wyck's clock is noteworthy for his remedy of this fault. He provided a means of standardizing the speed of the clock at such times by a compensatlng weight attacbed to gear. The effect of this arrangement checked the revolutions of the main barrel housing the weigbts and so long as they too were in uniformity the clock kept perfect time.

Rarely mentioned is the historical significance of De Wyck's clock. Aside from showing the mastery of one with a thorough knowledge of mechanics it was the forerunner embodying many of the principles of clock making in vogue today, even though they may be refined to a greater degree. Also historically it is told that it was the bell of De Wyck's clock that gave the signal to the soldiers to start the horrible Huguenot massacre of St. Bartholomew ordered by Catherine de Medici.

It is strange that a clock which formed the basis for further discovery in clock making, as famous as it was, had only one hand. Because of the size of the mechanism the movement of this hour hand was stiff and awkward. The entire clock was driven by a 500 pound weight attached to a rope whicb was wound around a barrel one foot in diameter.

APOCALYPTIC NUMBER

★ By Pete Bogg ★

AMONG the many mysteries yet to be solved is the famous Apocalyptic Number. It derives its name from the revelation of St. John, known as the *Apocalypse*.

The mystery centers about the interpretation of the number 666. The number is found in the writings but no explanation is given. Through the ages various interpretations have been given but generally each is based on occult prediction. Most often it has been mentioned in connection with tyrants and famous personages, mostly of ill repute. Earliest Bible commentators labelled Nero as the explanation of the number, but no proof was ever found.

In the middle ages Luther was alleged to be connected, by some numerical manipulation, with the supposedly sinister number. However, Luther, in his famous decree, showed tbat the number could be used to indicate the length of the papal reign, and he predicted its rapid end.

The number has been a boon to numerologists of recent times. The latest additions to the select list of 666 owners have been Hitler and Mussolini. But as time continues, so will the mystery of tbe meaning of the Apocalyptic Number.

TROJAN TELEGRAPHY

★ By Cal Webb ★

BECAUSE of its everyday usage the telegraph is assumed as a recent modern invention. But such is not the case for early history shows that sending messages by a prearranged code is an ancient practice. Fire, drums, and beacons all have their place in developing what we know as the telegram today.

The eleventh century B.C., is the first mention given to telegraphy. The story is told that the news of the fall of Troy to Agamemnon was borne to the palace at Mycenae by the beacons stretching from Mount Ida to the palace.

The employment of code in warfare dates back to the third century B.C. During the Punic Wars a reputed military strategist confronted with the difficulty of getting messages to his troops with speed devised the forerunner of the Morse Code. Some of his troops were deployed in the hills and relayed his orders to the front llnes. According to the plan of the code this array of torches were displayed and hidden in turns.

Other variations in the system were invented by varying the size of the flame of each torcb, colored flame, and constantly changing the combination of the torches.

* * *

Ernest's Evil Entity

by Arthur T. Harris



Mabel looked thoughtfully down upon the calm figure of Ernest. Was she really looking at *him*—or was it somebody else? . . .

ERNEST never quite knew when the idea hit him, but he had to admit it was a humdinger.

"Mr. Schnapps," his boss had said. "Mr. Schnapps, I need not say that your efforts are appreciated by this firm. Nevertheless, there is an aspect to your work to which more attention should be devoted. The personal public relations angle, I mean."

Ernest gasped involuntarily. His stomach did nip-ups. His kidneys sank further into the small of his back. Mentally he made a note to phone over to the druggist for a thousand phenobarbital capsules, a hundred effervescent stomach tablets and ten bottles of milk of magnesia.

Ernest knew that he was a weakling afraid of even his own shadow — but then his *other self* began to change him . . .



For Josiah P. Clunque, his boss, was at it again. Old Josiah, the pompous nitwit, Ernest thought bitterly. Old Josiah, who was such a joy-killer that he had to delegate his executives to do the company's official back-slapping, polite throat-cutting and professional social chores.

"Yes, sir?" Ernest said resignedly.

"I knew you wouldn't let me down," Clunque beamed fishily. "We've received banquet invitations from the Moral Uplift League, the Society for the Prevention of Crime, the National Youth and Old Age League, the Old Dogs' and Soldiers' Home, and the Modern Spinsters' Society. Then, too, each of these organizations expects us to attend directors' meeting and make suitable suggestions.

"In addition—"

"Please put it all down on an inter-office memo," Ernest bleated piteously. "If you think I'll last that long." He fled to his office down the hall bolted past his secretary and slammed the door of his inner sanctum, where he collapsed in his swivel chair.

"At last, Ernest Schnapps," Ernest thought bitterly. "At last you're at the end of your rope. There's no way out. You got yourself into this—and now you can't get out. Woe, oh, woe, is me!"

Unconsciously Ernest reached into his desk drawer for his favorite pint. Ernest was not a drinking man, but he had his moments, and those moments, of late, had not been few or far between. He unscrewed the cap, took a quick, secretive swallow, choked, grimaced and got the rotgut down his gullet.

He took another nip, and another. Presently he became suffused with a pleasant, familiar glow.

"Ernest Schnapps, you worm," he whispered thickly. "You've got no more will-power than Hitler's Aunt Tillie. Instead of hitting up your morale, you hit the bottle."

This time, he knew, it was the limit. He simply didn't have the physical strength to address any more banquets, advise any more decrepit boards of directors, or flit hither and yon like a social butterfly . . .

After a bit Ernest's gloomy eye opened. It rested detachedly, almost disgustedly on the emptying bottle. It roamed over to a sheaf of little brochures on his desk. His lips curling, Ernest picked up one of the booklets, held it to his nose and made a symbolic gesture.

And then, suddenly, he started. He started and glanced again at the little blue cover. Stared at it until his blue eyes widened in amazement.

Relax!
The Original Psycho-Therapeutic
Guide for Tired Business Men
By
A. Hamilton Pyles, Ph. D.
Clunque Publishing Company

"Eureka!" shouted Ernest Schnapps. "Two hundred thousand copies of this hokum have sold like hot cakes, and I never read the fool thing. Must be something in it. "Hmmm . . ."

Ernest settled back in his chair to concentrate. Slowly he turned the pages. By the time he got to Chapter III he was literally sweating with relief. For the little brochure said:

You are only what you think you are. If you think you are tired, then you are tired. If you think you are overworked, abused, taken advantage of, then most certainly everyone you meet will figuratively kick you in the pants.

Wake up! Live! Relax! Put yourself on such a mental plane that you can actually visualize yourself as two persons, two separate but still integrated human beings.

The first person is tired, discouraged, easy to give up. The second man denies the weaknesses of the flesh. Let the first person sink into the doldrums—the second person will carry on in his stead!

For to each man of courage and vision is given a dual personality. The first is the one his friends and associates see: weak, vain, mortal, easily tiring. But the second man is the man who really lives! He is that brave soul whose spirit soars aloft, to confound his friends and frighten his adversaries by the brilliance of his thought and the daring of his execution.

Relax, then! Live! Put the first man to bed when the sun goes down, the old dodo. But let the second man take his rightful place on the world's stage. Because—

That second man is YOU!

ERNEST never knew how long he had dozed. When he woke up the sun was down and the stars were out. His secretary had peeked in, sniffed and gone home. The offices of the Clunque Publishing Company were as silent as the tomb.

He yawned, stretched and suddenly sat bolt upright. Because the incredible had happened. For practically the first time in his life, his liquor-swabbed mouth did not taste like a prehistoric squirrel's cage. His eyes did not see double, his joints did not creak, and his stomach was not heaving and grunting.

"Ye gods!" Ernest thought wildly. "I should be suffering from the usual Clunque hangover, but instead I feel like a newborn babe. This is not right; in fact it makes no sense whatsoever. By all the rules I should be a dehydrated corpse—yet I don't feel that way. Hmmm!"*

Buoyed up with new vim and vigor, Ernest glanced at his desk pad, to discover that he had an engagement that very night to attend the annual banquet of the Old Dogs' and Soldiers' Home at the Elks Club.

"Boy, I'm gonna knock 'em off their chairs!" he vowed. Ernest put on his hat, stopped off at a downtown groggery for a short snort, and went home to put on his soup and fish.

"Honey Lamb!" exclaimed his buxum wife as Ernest entered the Schnapps' apartment. "I've felt the most terrific urge all day to play gin rummy, and—"

"Cover girl!" Ernest cried, grimacing as he kissed his spouse's ever-powdered face. For fifteen years, he had been her "Honey Lamb" and she had been his "Cover Girl." It was an old, monotonous, hypocritical routine that never varied.

"Cover girl," Ernest purred diplomatically, "I've got to let you down tonight. Banquet at the Elks Club. Josiah P. Clunque himself demands my presence."

Mabel Schnapps' big mouth fell open. Her eyes stared angrily and she

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* Ernest does not realize it, but the fact is, his subconscious mind has been working in a psychosomatic pattern. He had put his conscious mind to sleep, as it were, with liberal doses of *spiritus frumenti*—whiskey. Therefore his subconscious mind went to work on the last conscious perceptions he had received—the advice contained in Prof. Pyles' brochure "relax!"

In other words, using somewhat heroic measures, Ernest had followed the same treatment given patients suffering from wartime neuroses. Injections of insulin or sodium penthtal induce a dreamlike sleep in which the patient, freed of restraint, discusses—while asleep—what has been troubling his mind.

The psychiatrist then goes to work on the patient's troubles and straightens them out. The corollary of this process, in Ernest's case, is that Prof. Pyles' advice could at last penetrate into his consciousness once the barrier of hypertension had been removed. This is precisely similar to the treatment whereby a psychiatrist induces a semiconscious state and then talks to the patient. When the patient wakes up, the psychiatrist's advice is indelibly impressed on his mind.—ED.

stamped her number ten foot on the floor.

"That over-stuffed moose!" she stormed. "Taking my precious husband from the arms of his devoted wife! Sometimes I have half a mind—"

Ernest shuddered. "Not that," he pleaded. "Not that! Just leave him be. After all he buys our groceries, and—" he glanced at his watch. "Ouch! Got to hurry." and he dashed down the hallway to his room.

Among her other habits—and Mabel Schnapps' whole life was an unfortunate habit—she snored. She snored so loudly that Ernest, Jr., their only child had quit high school and joined the marines. She whooshed and snorted and bayed in her sleep with such unconscionable abandon that Ernest, Sr. had long since moved down the hall leaving Mabel to toss herself to sleep with a confession magazine, a two-pound box of candy and a ham sandwich—but no Ernest on the other third of the bed.

So Ernest, alone in his room, tore off his clothes, took a hot shower and got in his tuxedo. Then he yawned. Ernest Schnapps was a fiend for hot-water showers, and they always made him sleepy. This evening was no exception. He looked at the electric alarm clock on the dresser.

"Fifteen minutes," Ernest said, setting the clock. "Just a li'l catnap." He lay down and was off to slumberland in one minute flat.

A QUARTER hour later, the alarm went off. Ernest started, cussed, yawned, stretched and got out of bed. That is to say, Ernest Schnapps will swear to his wife's dying day that it was not he who dressed and left the bedroom that night.

But it was.

The bodily, the corporeal Ernest Schnapps got up, shut off the alarm and went promptly back to bed. Because Ernest was sleepy, he was tired, and Mabel Schnapps was not the best cook in the world. If she woke him up for dinner, that was his tough luck.

But the *other* Ernest had no such intentions. The other Ernest rose from the bodily form of the sleeping Ernest. Ernest Schnapps No. 2 quietly dressed, smeared a hair oil on his thinning locks, donned his black Homburg and strode down the hallway.

Mabel was sitting in the parlor, listening to her favorite fifteen-minute broadcast: "Horror, Inc." and shuddering with each additional murder. Shuddering with a chocolate bon-bon in her mouth. Her eyes were fairly popping with delighted terror.

Reluctant to interrupt this happy mood, Ernest shook his head resignedly, unlatched the door and went off to his banquetorial chores. Now the Schnapps' front door was a very peculiar door, in that it opened and shut with an odd, rasping click.

Mabel, above the screams and alarms of the radio soap opera, heard this click. At least, she will tell posterity and all her neighbors that she heard it. And Ernest said she couldn't have heard it, because he never went out that night.

But of course, he did. Obviously he must have gone out, for a half hour later he was seated up at the speaker's table in the Elks Club, and at least three hundred people saw him, ate with him and listened breathlessly to his inspirational address.

"Gentlemen," declared T. Harrington Smythe, the banquet chairman, "we have here tonight a representative of the Clunque Publishing Company, whose fine educational pamphlets have done so much to—"

And amid torrents of half liquored-up applause, Ernest Schnapps, who had

been left out of World War 1 for flat feet and insomnia, got up to make the speech of his life, on the body beautiful.

It was a great address. It told how you could be born, raised, matured and buried if only you followed the advice (at 25 cents a copy) of the Clunque life-guidance and total-abstinence brochures. Ernest sat down to the greatest ovation of his life and hurriedly gulped a whisky, straight, to calm his oratorical excitement. . . .

Meanwhile, back home, Mabel Schnapps had grunted her last gasp, turned the radio dial from soap opera to a commentator, and waddled down the hall to the kitchen.

"Such a lovely meal," she thought, happily swallowing the meat loaf she'd prepared for herself and Ernest. The whole meat loaf, of course, together with the gravy, the potatoes, the peas and the pie.

Mabel had read for awhile, listened to three boogie-woogie platters and gone off to bed. But first, remembering to pull down her husband's bed covers and get out his slippers, she bulged dutifully into her helpmate's bedchamber.

She switched on the light—and there was Ernest Schnapps, absolutely sound asleep. Mábel stared. She moved over to the bed, determined to shake her life-partner awake and give him three, if not four pieces of her mind.

He'd said he was going off to a banquet, didn't he? Well, there he lay. *And besides, she'd heard the front door click.*

She'd cooked him a marvelous dinner, and he hadn't got up to eat it. This might be legal, but it certainly wasn't right or just.

Mabel stretched out her ham-like hand, hesitated, then drew back. Ernest had circles—dark circles—under his eyes. That miserable Josiah P. Clunque was working him too hard!

A tear in her eye, the remorseful Mabel crept out, carefully dousing the light and closing the door. In bed, munching on taffy and a stalk of celery liberally coated with roquefort cheese, the dutiful Mabel smiled wisely to herself.

"He's a good husband, to know when he's all in and go to bed. And I," she thought happily, "I'm a good wife because I have such a sweet and forgiving disposition."

IN ORDER to set the record straight, let it be pointed out, here and now, that the actual business of the old Dogs' and Soldiers' Home was not conducted in the banquet hall of the Elks Club that evening.

Rather, and purely for the benefits of parlimentary procedure, the officers of the society "adjourned" after the meeting—around 10:30—to a semi-official directors' room, otherwise known around town as Joe's Old Canadian Ale House.

Naturally, as honored speaker of the evening, Ernest Schnapps went along. In fact, Ernest even had an expense account for such occasions.

"Absolutely the limit," his boss, Josiah P. Clunque, had told him. "You can pick up all the checks in the place, just so the total isn't more than two dollars and seventy-five cents."

Ernest had long since signed away the $2.75 and was now proceeding on his own. How far he was proceeding, Ernest himself realized only dimly as the "meeting" wore on, and cared even less as the hour hand moved happily around the clock.

Finally T. Harrington Smythe, chairman of the board, after a series of indiscreet burps, moved to adjourn. There was much back-slapping, somebody got off the last smokehouse story; and

Ernest Schnapps found himself out in the cold dark night, surrounded by enthusiastic "directors."

"Les' go home," gurgled T. Harrington Smythe. "Anybody's home. "Woinhell's got a home 'round here?"

"We got a home!" Ernest exclaimed with happy inspiration. "The Old Dogs' and Soldiers' Home. Les' pay 'em a visit!"

"Marvelous idea!" one of the men hiccupped.

"Shwell!" said another.

They all piled into the Smythe sedan and roared on their way.

As joyrides go, this one was not particularly eventful. Ernest himself was at the wheel, not because it was his car or because he was a particularly good driver, but because he had been the first man shoved into the front seat.

It was an uneventful ride, a safe ride, barring one or two minor details, in the course of which the Smythe sedan almost sideswiped a truck laden with dynamite, breezed the fender of a milk truck, dug tracks in the road's soft shoulder for several miles and scared hell out of a troop of soldiers on a night



march.

Amid the clangor of the Smythe golden-toned auto horn, the screech of rubber on cement and the delighted whoops and howls of the rollicking frolickers, the official "inspecting" party wound up at last before the main dormitory of the Old Dogs' and Soldiers' Home.

Ghostly silence awaited their ar-



He presented a ludicrous sight, standing there holding the ash tray aloft and talking loudly

rival. All that showed was an occasional hall light. Even the inmates' dogs were asleep.

"Hell of a reception!" complained T. Harrington Smythe.

"You said it!" chimed in one of the directors.

"No way to treat visiting firemen!" shouted Ernest Schnapps.

They piled out of the car and rushed the front doorway. Ernest, the first man in, spied the charge of quarters, a venerable old veteran, just coming awake in his chair.

"Greetings!" Ernest shouted. "Where's the fire alarm?"

"Who? What? Where? What-the hell—" the old fellow bleated.

"Okay," Ernest growled disappointedly. "No cooperation. Find it myself."

"But you can't *do* that!" the old codger protested. "We have a lot of tired old veterans here, and some new ones too. Who are you guys? People just don't do things like that!"

"Oh yes, they do!" trilled T. Harington Smythe, sneaking up behind the charge of quarters and fastening an affectionate bear hug on his windpipe. "Come on, boys! Sound the alarm! We're gonna have an official parade—and I'm the visiting field marshal!"

Ernest Schnapps weaved over to the alarm box on the wall and gave the gadget a vigorous yank. Promptly a hellish din broke loose.

"Can't I be your adjutant?" Ernest asked pleadingly. "You take the salute, and I'll hold your sword."

"Sure, you can be my adjutant!" roared T. Harrington Smythe. "But where's my sword?"

"Here it is!" yelled one of the directors. He grabbed a nearby ash stand and handed it over.

"Kind of heavy," Smythe said disapprovingly.

"It's better than a sword," Ernest observed happily, as the rest of the revelers shouted for the old soldiers to come downstairs, line up in formation and prepare themselves for inspection. "It's better than a sword, Marshal Smythe. It's a scepter!"

"A scepter," Smythe mused slowly. "Excellent!"

It would be unkind, if not uncharitable, to describe the scene that now took place. A mad rush for the fire exits was taking place. Honored war veterans rushed wildly down fire escapes, some in pajamas, some in blankets. Some came downstairs to the central hallway, saw Smythe and Ernest Schnapps drawn up stiffly in official pose, and halted dumbstruck in their tracks.

Meanwhile, in other dormitory buildings, lights were coming on, men were shouting and the home's fire department, with a terrific clang of whistles and bells, was already rolling up to the rescue. It was confusion twice compounded by chaos.

Yet never a muscle moved on the rigid, parade-ground figures of T. Harrington Smythe, Ernest Schnapps and the official inspection party. Like statues—like rubber statues, perhaps—the directors stood their ground, staring foggily straight ahead of them.

And that, to wind up this unfortunate scene, is how the authorities and doctors of the Old Dogs' and Soldiers' Home found the board of directors when the aforesaid officials, themselves shocked out of sleep, arrived on the official "parade ground."

Dr. Horace Hochzeit, head of the home, experienced every emotion but a hemorrhage. Dr. Hockzeit effected a professional gray beard, pince-nez spectacles and small, bony feet which protruded embarrassedly from his shower clogs.

"What in the name of Sam Hill—" he exploded. "Why, it's Mr. Smythe, chairman of our board of directors! And these other gentlemen, why, they're directors too! Who? What? Oh, I say, this is ridiculous and—"

"Silence!" snapped Adjutant Ernest Schnapps, with a poorly concealed hiccough. "I said, Shilence! Marshal Smythe is about to review his troops!"

"Parade rest! Right shoulder, Left dress! We have met the enemy and he is ours!" roared T. Harrington Smythe.

DR. HOCHZEIT'S eyes practically popped from their sockets. Meanwhile the war veterans were gathering around. If there is anything a soldier hates, it's being awakened from a sound sleep, except when someone is throwing a free beer party. The G. Is. in the Old Dogs' and Soldiers' Home were no exception.

"Drunks!" declared one disgusted ex-master sergeant.

"An outrage!" "Damned fools!" "Parasites!" "Stock market speculators!"

Now Dr. Horace Hochzeit may have worn a beard, he may have had pince-nez spectacles, and he may have looked slightly out of this world. But the painful fact is that Dr. Hochzeit, far from being a dope, could recognize a financial angel at a distance not covered by the telescope in the Mt. Wilson observatory.

It took Dr. Hochzeit little time to recover his aplomb.

"Gentlemen!" he intoned pontifically, wincing inwardly at his hypocrisy. "Gentlemen, we are being paid an—ah—somewhat unofficial visit by our generous board of directors."

"Unofficial, hell!" snorted T. Harrington Smythe.

"Generous?" roared the assembled vets.

"Now let's all go back to bed," Dr. Hochzeit urged frantically, feeling like Daniel in a den crowded with lions, nazis and bill collectors. "Let's all go back to bed, and tomorrow we'll each one of us have an extra ration of ice cream."

"'Ration' is right!" snorted a disgusted old-timer. "If the OPA heard about the meals here, they'd hang you!"

The look the medical director focused upon the objector would have shriveled a slab of platinum. Nevertheless, the good doctor's words had their effect—not exactly a desirable effect, as the veterans trooped off to bed with a chorus of catcalls, angry expletives and certain other expressions not customarily heard in polite society.

Mopping the sweat from his anguished brow, Dr. Hochzeit bowed apologetically to the visiting directors.

"A pleasure, gentlemen!" he said. "Now I think it would be a capital idea if we repaired to the kitchen for sandwiches, cake and—uh—black coffee."

It is the recorded memory of the Old Dogs' and Soldiers' Home that Dr. Hochzeit thereupon distinguished himself by a display of effort not seen since the good medico ran away from a live "corpse" which pranksters had planted in the dissecting room during his student medical days.

Dr. Hochzeit personally made the coffee, personally cut the cake, and was personally frightened out of his wits when Ernest Schnapps, after his third cup of black coffee, began to act very strangely indeed.

"Fiends!" Ernest shrieked suddenly at the top of his voice. "Where are the dogs around here?"

"The dogs," Dr. Hochzeit explained quickly, "are in their kennels. As you know, each veteran here is given a dog honorably discharged from the Army's

K-Nine Corps. Furthermore—"

"Woof-woof!" Ernest bayed, getting down on all fours and starting to sniff. "A dog is as good as you are any day! As adjutant of this official inspection, I demand that the dogs be brought here forthwith, if not sooner!"

T. Harrington Smythe, now rapidly sobering up, looked frantically alarmed and also tragically sheepish. So did the other members of the board of directors. The black coffee was having a painful, if salutary, effect. Ye gods, what if the papers should get hold of this escapade?

"Bow-wow!" Ernest woofed. "Every dog has his day, say I!" And he began barking and sprinting around the room, wagging his head and otherwise behaving very badly.*

Dr. Hochzeit approached in his best bedside manner, reserved for well-to-do etired generals.

"My good fellow," he cooed, "just follow me into my private office, and we will discuss this matter further."

With Smythe and the sobering directors staring unhappily, Ernest Schnapps (No. 2) padded on all fours behind the diplomatic doctor. Hochzeit led him from the kitchen to his office upstairs, closed the door behind them and opened a little white medical cabinet.

From this he took a bottle labeled "Elixir of Phenobarbital." He glanced at Ernest. Ernest was wagging happily, appreciative of such personal attention.

"A schizoid, as I live and breathe," Dr. Hochzeit muttered. He replaced the elixir and brought forth another bottle, this one labeled "Paraldehyde." He poured out a good-sized slug in a measuring glass.

"What's your name, old boy?" Hochzeit purred.

"Schnapps," Ernest half barked. "Ernest Schnapps. Three-oh-eight Pussywillow Terrace. And I'm not old!"

"Of course not," soothed the medico. "Assuredly not. Just drink this delightful liqueur, please."

He held the glass down to Ernest's newly assumed, dog-like level. Ernest grinned happily, opened his mouth, and the doctor poured the stuff down his throat.

Ernest recoiled as if shot. His arms and legs failed convulsively. He flattened out, stretched full length and promptly went into a deep sleep.

Shaking his head, Dr. Hochzeit thumbed through the phone book and dialed Ernest's number. After a bit, a heavy feminine voice came on.

"Yes? Who is this? At this hour, what in the world—"

"Madam," said Dr. Hochzeit, controlling his temper with a great effort, "this is the Old Dogs' and Soldiers' Home. Your husband was seized with —uh—slight attack of indigestion tonight and is now under my personal care.

"I assure you, he will be back at the office tomorrow, none the worse for wear. We are glad to have him with us, and—"

"You are absolutely out of your mind!" shrieked Mabel Schnapps, who hated doctors ever since one had told her she was too fat. "My husband is right home in his bed at this very moment. You must mean two other people. What do you mean, annoying innocent people at this hour of the

* It must be remembered that this is Ernest Schnapps No. 2 who is acting so oddly. Ernest No. 1—the real, tired, home-loving Ernest—has been safely in bed for hours. Ernest No. 2 is the result of a schizophrenic, or split, personality—with this difference: that Ernest's sampling of happy liquids has upset his mental balance. He is a schizoid thrice confounded. His real self is home, asleep. His second self is where we now find him. And from this second self has been drawn a third psyche, or soul, by alcoholic circumstances which have completely upset his sense of balance, both mental and physical.—Ed.

night?"

Dr. Horace Hochzeit turned red, white and blue.

"Madam," he shrieked, "perhaps we should leave the subject of who is sane up to the nearest psychiatrist! Here—I'll put your husband on the phone."

And, murder in his eyes, he swung about to confront Ernest Schnapps, entirely forgetting the dosage of the equivalent of knockout drops.

But Ernest wasn't there! There was absolutely no trace whatsoever of Ernest (No. 2) Schnapps. Nothing but the outline which showed where Ernest had lain on the soft plush carpet. *Ernest had disappeared into thin air.*

"Madam," said Dr. Hochzeit, turning white as his housekeeper's sheet, "madam, I apologize. It is I, not you, who shall have to consult a psychiatrist."

Now it was the good doctor's turn to sample the medicine cabinet.

NEEDLESS to say, ever-loving Mabel made waddling tracks for her helpmate's bedroom. Ernest never heard her push open the door or throw on the light switch, he was that deep in slumberland.

"Ernest Schnapps!" Mabel screamed, reaching for a long-sandled hairbrush. "You're a no-good, deceitful philanderer!"

Ernest came foggily to his senses. "What's that, m'love?" he said thickly, sleepily. "Hey! What are you doing with that hairbrush?"

"You've been out, painting the town red!" Mabel screeched. "I *knew* I heard the front door click! You—you unfaithful wretch!"

"No, no!" Ernest yelped, scrabling out of bed as Mabel advanced with the vengeful brush. "I swear I've been here the whole night! I think I had a banquet engagement, but I must have fallen asleep, and—"

"Liar!" the outraged Mabel shouted. "I just received a call from a doctor. He said you were sick—booze, probably!—and—"

"But I haven't left this room all night!" Ernest bellowed frantically.

Mabel Schnapps, huffing and puffing in her mad chase, halted uncertainly. After all, Ernest had never lied to her in all their wedded bliss. He had been a good husband, and— But on the other hand, how could one man be in two places at the same time?

And if he had been at the soldiers' home, how could he have got back so quickly? Mabel knew perfectly well she heard that door click! So he must have gone out. But he couldn't possibly have come home in the interval between the doctor's phone call, and the few seconds it took her to waddle down the hallway to his room. . . .

In any event, when Mabel Schnapps read the write-up of Ernest's banquet speech in the morning papers, it took three attendants to hold her down while they laced her up.

THE END

SNAKE STONES

★ **By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT** ★

THE folklore of many nations has associated the diamond and other precious gems with serpents. Among the ancient Celtic tribes, "snake stones" were used in their religious rites. The druids thought that a large number of snakes would get together and make the magic stone which had unlimited uses. In France, diamonds were believed to be made by snakes gathering together in large numbers and forming the stones out of their saliva. The peasants of Austria-Hungary believed that all precious gems had their origin from snakes and that if they could just find a snake's nest it would contain a wealth of diamonds.

The WELL-WISHER

By Bernie Kamins

Wilbur Flinch had one remarkable ability—he could see through things—because of the strange well, of course

WILBUR FLINCH rounded the curving country road and peered through his dirty tortoise-shell glasses at the scene ahead. As he stood there, the dust of several days' foot-traveling covering his tattered clothes, he thought he saw a well. Might be a mirage, he thought, but no, there it was, rocky perimeter, rope-mill and circular handle.

Though his shins ached from the thirty-odd miles he had hiked since dawn—a peregrination which had a healthy start due to his discovery in a barn by a persistent mongrel—, the frail young man almost ran towards the welcome structure.

He stumbled against the wall, placed the rusty pail in mid-air, and began to turn the handle with both hands. As the metal container swung downwards, it bumped resoundingly against the hidden interior. Finally, he saw, it must have reached the bottom because the remaining rope was slack. But there was no splash of water. It was a dry well.

By this time, the sun was dipping in the west and the evening winds were beginning to blow. Accustomed to crawling into a cave or even under a jutting rock for shelter, unable to see much around him because of the gathering darkness, he tried to ferret out with his eyes the inside of the yawning cavern beside him. Then, with a grim tightening of his lips which seemed to say that he had no alternative, he climbed over the side, grabbed hold of the rope with his two bony hands, twined his legs around it and slowly allowed himself to descend. At least, he would have the protection of the well from the night's bitter elements and then he would resume his travels at daylight.

When his shoes touched firm ground he rubbed his hands along his trousers. His palms and his ankles were burning from the rough hemp rope. He shuffled his torn leather brogans slowly around him, feeling some small stones and then something soft like a bundle of rags. He groped for it, picked it up and surmised in the blackness that it was a child's doll. It did not arouse any tender associations in the mind of Wilbur Flinch because Flinch was family-less. He had never married. He had never had money enough at one time to spend on anything but the bare necessities of living.

Wilbur's one treasure was with him, a gift from public school years ago. Without this gift, he would have been a lost soul indeed. The possession was his eyeglasses. These days, he rarely took them off, even for well-earned cleaning.



Wilbur climbed slowly from the well, his eyes blazing through the darkness around him . . .

Huddled on the ground at the bottom of the well, his hands in his pockets to resist cold and the ragdoll under his face for a pillow, he allowed several thoughts to cross his mind before his tired body relaxed into sleep—his previous day's chore as a woodchopper for a warm turkey dinner, the drunken farmer who mistakenly called him a thief and chased him from his house in the dead of night and his final capitulation to sleep close to morning in the man's barn.

A LOUD crash jarred him from his slumbers. The pail was slamming against the wall as it was being hoisted upwards. The darkness had lifted a little so he knew it was day. The chattering of happy children at a distance above him came to his ears. The lowering and the bobbing of the pail told him that unskilled childish hands were playing with the guide-rope.

'Hey, let that rope alone!" He bellowed up at the top of his lungs.

For a moment there was dead silence. He began to wonder if he had scared the children off. But he didn't wonder long.

Suddenly shrill voices bubbled excitedly. This was followed by a shower of dirt and stone.

"You darn kids!" Now he was mad. What did they think he was, an animal?

He peered upwards—into another burst of gravel.

He guessed the children were too young to know what they were doing or to realize that the now disappearing rope was his only means of escape from the well.

His yelling merely achieved the success of an answering echo in the unholy place. The little think-nots above had apparently retreated to play elsewhere.

With his fingertips and toes he managed to get a hold on the wall. Using the uneven rocks as ladder rungs he made some progress, his body hugging the cold quartz. Then he arrived at a smooth section of the well and could proceed no further upwards. Cautiously, his right foot tapped downwards to find a niche so that he might once more get down to security. It might be better to wait for adult help, he decided, than to risk falling any dangerous distance and breaking his neck.

Simultaneously with the discovery of the jutting piece, the new rock, loosened from its entrenchment after many years, gave way. Wilbur Flinch took a deep breath and relaxed his muscles as he toppled—a trick he had once learned to avoid breaking or twisting tense sinews. Flat on his back, stunned more by the surprise than by physical injury, Wilbur felt an awful fear.

His glasses no longer rested on his nose. Before he moved, he knew that they were broken irreparably.

A tide of despair now surged through him. Even if he were succored from his plight, without being able to see much further than his nose, he wouldn't be able to eke out an existence unless Providence intervened somehow.

As if this very thought of Providence were an omen, suddenly he realized that there were voices above him again. The noise of the clattering pail followed but it was a different noise this time indicating that the pail was filled with something. Probably more dirt and stones he thought.

Resting on the bottom finally, the pail was found to contain eatables. By the dim light, he recognized carrots, apples and pears. No sooner had he emptied the children's offering than the pail was whisked upwards again.

He devoured every morsel in peace. When he finished the voices were gone. He sank back to rest.

LATER in the day, the performance was repeated, this time with cold chicken and oranges. He divined that the children were playing a game with him and he was amused at the thought that he was dining on rather a rich man's fare without the necessity of working for it.

This game continued for three days.

At times he shouted for help. Once he tried shinnying up the hemp when it reached him with its select tablefare. But mindful of the risk this involved to his person he gave it up and he decided to wait until adult aid came. However he was thankful now for the children. When they played at the top of the well and looked over it he imagined he saw their faces in the aperture. He knew, of course, this was silly because of his very bad eyesight. Yet he realized he could see the opening quite well.

Attributing it to the fact that he was becoming accustomed to the darkness he also realized that he was able to see his immediate surroundings at night. It was amazing but he no longer felt the soreness in his eyes. By the evening of the fourth day he could see well enough to examine every little detail of his round prison. By midnight he had worked up enough courage to climb up the wall again, this time looking ahead of him to sight the suitable cracks and crevices for footholds.

Once out in the chill he took long breaths, filled his lungs and set out down the road. He was able to maintain a brisk pace because he was able to see the road for some distance before him, an astonishing feat for him, particularly since it was a moonless night. Not a star appeared in the sky. There were no man-made lights to guide him. Nevertheless, Wilbur Flinch was seeing his way as if it were paved by phosphorescence.

Five minutes later he strode into a quiet town and immediately sensed that he was walking in the middle of a nightmare or a bad dream. For, one by one, he could see into each home—without the benefit of open doors or windows!

The nightmare was the only explanation. Wilbur knew for gospel that he had not imbibed. He had not touched liquor for years, not since the time he had stolen a jug of corn brew from a neighbor's cellar.

If it were a dream or hallucination, he promised himself, he would dream or hallucinate to the fullest. Consequently he began to execute his decision. In one broken-down house as he x-rayed through the outer wall, he sighted four men counting money over the dining room table. Through the closed front door he telescoped to the top of the stairs where a dog was sleeping.

A quaint white cottage next door interested him. He peered through one side of the house and saw an old lady sleeping soundly in her bedroom. He peered through the other wing of the cottage and saw there a young lady just pulling out the lamplight. He caught a glimpse of her face as she tucked herself under the covers and then he was more than ever convinced of the unreality of his present escapade.

She was as attractive as a man might wish.

Hurriedly, merely to satisfy a curiosity whether he were still slumbering at the bottom of a well or imagining things as he walked, he inspected the rest of the house through the walls to ascertain the presence of males in that family. Strangely he seemed relieved that there were none.

Wilbur Flinch at that moment made up his mind to remain in that vicinity. He turned back to the well, climbed down the side and went to sleep.

IN the morning Wilbur started into town to see whether or not the road

was familiar to him. He wanted to know for sure if he had been dreaming. He hadn't been dreaming. There was the broken-down house. There was the white cottage. He could still see extraordinarily. He wondered about the vision of loveliness he had seen, and then, for the first time in his life, was anxious to do something about himself.

He took his new eye-power for granted. His thoughts were on the girl. Perhaps he should find himself a job, buy some clothes, and become respectable.

As he lazily dawdled along the sidewalk the strange virtuous feeling that he ought to make something of himself grew and grew. Suddenly he was aware of the strong appealing odor of apple pie and, looking up, he saw a restaurant before him. He pushed open the door and went inside.

"You the boss?" he uneasily asked the cashier.

"Naw, you want Mr. Lardner. He's probably in the kitchen bawling out the cook."

Wilbur actually was surprised at himself as he casually rambled towards the rear of the place and entered the door marked "Kitchen." He knew at a glance that the boss must be the short-statured stoutish man. He was reading off a list of groceries.

"Tomatoes, Henry—now don't pay too much for them. Ninety pounds of beef. Don't let him give you too much fat, Henry. Butter and—"

At this juncture, the rolly-polly individual looked at Wilbur questioningly with his eyes. Uncomfortably Wilbur spoke up.

"Excuse me. I just wanted to ask—"

"If you're peddling anything, we don't want any," the restauranteur broke in.

"Well, I'm not exactly peddling. I'm looking—"

"Oh, you're looking for a job, ain't you?" Now Lardner was definitely more interested in Flinch than in his grocery list.

He beamed anxiously at Wilbur, took him easily by the arm to a corner of the kitchen.

"Wanta work?"

"Guess so. Thought maybe you could use another hand around here. I'm a stranger in town." Flinch got his story across in a brief instant.

"We don't pay fancy but we pay honest. We give thirty-five cents an hour and meals but you gotta work for breakfast or lunch and dinner."

"For breakfast or lunch and dinner?" Wilbur mimicked unconsciously.

"Yeah. You work two meals a day so you can have some time but you only get paid for the hours you work. How about it?"

"I'll take the job," Wilbur heard himself saying. "What do I have to do?"

"Be here at six tomorrow morning and I'll tell you," the business man promised.

WELL before six, right after sunrise, Wilbur appeared and waited for some time before his boss arrived, nodded approval, found the right key and entered. He marched to the kitchen, Wilbur following him. He pointed to the sink, piled high with dishes and silverware from the night before. In a few minutes, the cook arrived. Then the three of them ate breakfast together.

The cook afterwards collected their dishes and handed them to Flinch. This was apparently the signal for him to begin his toil, so he rolled up his sleeves and started for the sink. Lardner showed him the mechanics of procuring hot water, mixing the soap, using the brushes and then left his new employee alone to wonder whether he would ever finish the hundreds of soiled pieces.

Wilbur washed dishes until he was

doing the job automatically. Lardner was well pleased, for his new man washed throughout breakfast, lunch and dinner. At closing time that first day Wilbur trudged tiredly to the well.

It was as good a living place as any. It furnished seclusion and it furnished something else—by now Wilbur was convinced that some property in the rock was magically or medically treating his eyes.

As weary as he could ever remember he lay back half against the wall and gazed into the blackness until it became grey. His eyes wandered up and down the circular embankment opposite him, studying the crevices one by one, peering onto the little ledges, examining shiny points in the rock. The glimmering specks, he figured, had a great deal to do with his newly acquired eye power. Perhaps they shot out rays, unseen rays, which were medically curative to the retina. Or maybe there were vibrations in the darkness. He had heard about such things, vibrations that brought about nervous reactions in people. Sometimes nervous reactions accomplished miraculous events in the human system. It occurred to him that mankind really possessed very little of the knowledge that could be acquired finally about molecular structures in the atmosphere, about electricity, radium, atomic energy and hidden minerals.

At last he told himself that his experience should be looked upon merely as one of the natural wonders beyond the ken of a nonscientific-minded human being.

With that decision he let the matter rest. The monotony of the silence and the visible panorama overpowered his senses. Contentedly he fell asleep.

For six whole days he worked diligently and hard. He found it strange that he enjoyed the routine. He had his daily performance down pat now. But he got his biggest thrill when Mack, the cook, said:

"Here you are pal. You really deserve the dough," and handed him his week's pay, two fresh ten dollar bills and five crisp dollars.

"You know," he confided to Mack, now his friend, "this is the first regular salary I've earned in three years."

"Better get yourself some new duds with it, bo. Yours are falling apart," Mack suggested.

Mack was right. Pocketing his bills carefully, he worked silently and impatiently that day. Several times he felt them through his trousers to make sure the greenbacks were still where he put them. He could hardly wait at closing time to hasten out into the street to buy himself an outfit.

In a few minutes he sighted a clothing store. The clerk must have been pleasantly surprised when his smiling customer purchased the first jacket and trousers which he displayed to him professionally.

But Flinch was a man of importance as he departed from the shop. He was clad in a checkered sports coat and gray flannel pants, not to mention the $2.75 in his pocket.

The novelty of seeing everything, in and out of sight, was wearing off. He was certain that the constantly increasing vision was due to the hours he was spending in the cavern, which he had cleaned up as best he could. However, with his new clothes, he was beginning to feel he could not remain in those dusky quarters.

Mustering up his courage one day, he gingerly knocked on the door of the white cottage. He could see the old lady hurry from the kitchen to the parlor to the hall, straighten her apron in front of the mirror and come to the door.

Would she rent him a room? Why of course.

THAT night at dinner he was introduced to Lucille. She was lovely. She was so lovely that he was speechless. Blue-eyed, with dark auburn hair, slim, Lucille was the same girl he had stolen glances at through the house walls on his first venture into town. She was the niece of the old lady, whose name was Turner. So internally embroiled was Wilbur that he could not eat much. It was Sunday evening and the three of them spent part of it talking on the veranda.

No, he was not musically inclined. He was born in Peoria and he had no family ties anywhere, that is, none of which he was aware.

Later Mrs. Turner went to bed. Wilbur very politely kept his head turned away from her bedroom until he was sure she was settled for the night.

It was Lucille who suggested a stroll before retiring. As they perambulated along the sidewalk a few minutes later, Wilbur stopped suddenly and stared across the street.

"Something wrong?" she asked.

"A man's stealing from the cash register in that grocery store," he softly explained.

"How do you know?" she wondered. "You can't see from here."

"I know," concernedly insisted Wilbur. "I know as sure as we are walking here together."

He was so in earnest that Lucille hesitated an instant before she gently laughed, "Oh, but you're joking."

"No I'm not. I never was so serious in my life. I know a man is robbing that store. I can see him, but it's none of my business."

They continued their stroll in silence for a few seconds. She looked backwards and across the street in nervous fashion, not knowing whether her companion was having fun at her expense or merely making conversation. Almost exasperatedly then, she stopped and exclaimed: "Mr. Flinch, if you do not stop trying to be so mysterious, you can be no friend of mine!"

Again they moved along in silence. They started through the park.

"Let's sit here for a minute. I'll do my best to explain," begged Wilbur, as they reached the first bench. He hoped he wouldn't lose the friendship of this beautiful creature by talking what seemed to be utter nonsense.

"I really don't know the reason for it. I can't understand exactly what has happened to me to make me see so well. The simple truth is that I can see through housewalls. I saw that thief at work.

"You will probably think me mad or something. Yet a very strange thing made my eyes what they are. Only a short time ago I wore glasses. My eyes were terribly bad."

Slowly she sat down beside him. She curiously examined his eyes with her own and this gave him a warm thrill. She still appeared to disbelieve him.

"Okay, I'll show you what I mean. We'll walk back the way we came. I'll tell you what's going on in every single house on the way!"

With this he quickly rose. He took her by the hand and hurried her along, realizing that she was wondering whether or not she was safe with him. After all, she had only just met him and the notions he had expressed were out of the ordinary.

AS they walked on and he painted more descriptions to her, of the activities in the houses they passed, she grew more and more fascinated.

"There's a fat woman on the first floor of that apartment house," began Flinch again when they had walked a block.

"She's fishing through her husband's trouser pockets. He's asleep. Ah, now

she's found something. Look like a note. She's reading it. She's shaking her fist at her husband but he's still sleeping. Now she's putting it back into his pocket."

Lucille smiled. This definitely was going to be fun. Wilbur was a man with a great deal of talent.

The man of talent saw that he was getting someplace, that he was whetting her interest. So he continued his delineations.

"In that hallway over there, an intoxicated gentleman is banging on the door with his shoes in his hands. His wife on the other side of the door is pushing chairs against it to keep him out."

As a test, when they returned home, Wilbur remained on the veranda while she went indoors. She took a book from the parlor, carried it to her bedroom, placed it carefully under the mattress near her pillow, and then rejoined Wilbur.

"You took the Bible from the parlor table—there's a letter beside where it was—and you brought the book to your room and hid it under the mattress!"

The next day, Lardner was in the kitchen reading off the grocery list to Mack. Wilbur, wiping his hands on his apron, slided over to the pair.

"Quitting?" Lardner asked, his face downfallen.

"No, sir," Wilbur replied. "I thought you would like to know that two men standing at the cashier's cage have guns in their coats. Perhaps you ought to call the police."

"How do you know that?" wondered his employer aloud, but he wasted no time. Mack was sent out the rear door for aid. Lardner re-entered the cafe just in time to be told to "reach."

The thugs had drawn their weapons. One trained his on the dozen or so patrons in the room. The other rifled the register in front of the startled cashier, pushing all the money into a green bag. The owner was sputtering under his breath.

As the thieves backed away in the direction of the door, a tribe of uniformed officers rushed into the place. The tussle was short-lived. Soon the customers were laughing about the matter.

But Lardner was not laughing. He went to Wilbur, put out his hand and shook Wilbur's.

"You saved us that time, Flinch. I owe you a lot. I don't know what to say."

Wilbur mumbled something in embarrassment.

"Tell me, how did you know these men were robbers?" Lardner persisted.

"The partition," Wilbur started, knowing that he had to have some believable excuse, "the partition there was open and I happened to see the men come in."

"I don't remember the partition being open," Lardner thoughtfully said, as he rubbed his chin. "But that's a good idea. From now on, I'll leave it open all the time. By the way, how did you know they were going to stick us up?"

"They looked suspicious," Wilbur replied. How could he explain he simply saw through the wall and through their coats at the pistols?

"They looked suspicious because their coats bulged and I thought they might have guns hidden." To tell the truth would have lost him his job he knew. A likely yarn that he saw right into the pockets of the men!

WILBUR walked to the cottage that night thinking how his new talent might be useful as an aid to society. He could spot culprits before their crimes were committed. He could prevent robbery and even bloodshed.

Meanwhile, Lucille had been greatly

impressed. In the afternoon, she discussed Wilbur with her aunt. She related his apparent machinations to her friends. Mrs. Turner, no different than other garrulous and gullible people, had passed along the gossip to Mrs. Wayne, the housekeeper in the house next door. Mrs. Wayne had seized on the news and had eagerly served it orally with the dinner to her own four boarders.

The boarders were the same quartet unsuspectingly inspected by Flinch on his first jaunt through the town. They had their own reasons for wanting to meet Flinch after Mrs. Wayne told her story.

As soon as they were left alone, the oldest man spoke up:

"This guy has a good racket. We could use him."

"Yeah," said another, "we could use him good in our business."

At this, the other two men laughed snickeringly. They they talked in whispering tones. They might sponsor Flinch in show business, maybe. He could be one of those seers on the stage, one of those guys who read notes through blindfolds. He would make an excellent "front" man for them. Should it turn out that Wilbur Flinch were really deft and took to their business, or even if he were an on-the-level fellow with a unique eye-power like Evil Eye Fink, they might be able to capitalize on him, build him up with publicity, make themselves rich. But first they had to catch their man. They had to make sure of him. They had to find out what he really possessed, whether he could be manipulated or coerced into partnership. So it was that they hurried through their Irish stew, finished early and went next door to Mrs. Turner's cottage to await her new roomer.

Having had what he considered an elegant dinner at the restaurant, part of his reward, Wilbur took his time enroute home. He was still ruminating about the uses of his new talent when he looked through the parlor wall from the outside of the house and saw the visitors. He remembered his first glimpse of them as they sat around a table counting greenbacks.

Mrs. Turner met him at the door.

"Wilbur, you have visitors tonight. They are neighbors of ours who are interested in your eyes."

Flinch allowed the old lady to lead him into the room.

"This is Mister Gaines."

Evidently the spokesman, Gaines, a hard-looking individual, gave a little nervous laugh.

"How do you do, Flinch. We were curious to meet you. These are my friends. Newcomb, Potter and Grimes. Live next door, you know."

As the speaker indicated the others in the room by a wave of his hand, Wilbur nodded slightly. He was unaccustomed to the attention and he discovered he liked it.

Gaines handed him a closed book.

"They tell me you can see through anything. How about book-covers?" he jestingly, but meaningfully, doubted.

"You hold the book on the other side of the room," Wilbur said, not unlike a stage magician in the process of starting his performance.

He returned the object to his guest, walked to the farther side of the room, turned and focused his eyes on the book that Gaines was holding on his knee.

"It's a book of poetry," Flinch began. "On page ten there is a poem that starts 'The Lord's powers are wondrous to behold, they work in mysterious ways.' On page twenty there is a picture of the Madonna. On page fifty there is a pencil mark on the margin."

Gaines opened the book. He turned to the specified pages one by one. Flinch was correct in every detail.

Soon he was describing the exact positions of the contents of the drawers of a locked desk, announcing the labels on the preserves he saw through the wall of the kitchen and disclosing the serial numbers on the money in the pockets of his guests. Then, leaving his acquaintances agape, he excused himself and went to his room.

Wilbur was very tired. His eyes were beginning to feel the strain.

THE next day, as he hurried along to work, he noticed that his eyesight was not so sharp as it was the day before. He could see abnormally but the distance of his vision was shortened. He was losing his strange new power. And he did not want to lose it now because it seemed to fascinate Lucille and he wanted above everything else to be the object of her interest, and more.

If he could maintain respectability he might be able to win her. He guessed now that all his life he had lacked one characteristic—confidence. The eye-power gave him this confidence and the confidence enabled him to get a job, hold his head up, really start planning a life for himself. No, he must not allow the super-vision to slip away. He would take steps to protect it.

Consequently he invited Lucille to walk with him after dinner that evening.

As they strolled together in the refreshing evening air, he was in a serious mood, but she was gay and prankful.

"Is some man beating his wife in one of these houses we are passing? Look through the walls and tell me."

"Not tonight, I guess. I mean, I can't do well tonight. My eyes seem to be failing," Wilbur almost stammered.

"Are you ill, Wilbur?" She stopped and turned to him.

"No, not exactly. I think I ought to spend a night or two back in the well. But I haven't the time. I've got a job to keep."

They continued their walk in silence for a moment. Then Lucille spoke.

"I'll take a message to the restaurant tomorrow that you are sick. You can go back to the well, darling."

At that moment, he knew that he loved Lucille more than anything else in his life.

When they reached the cottage, she ran inside. She brought him back a warm blanket and then kissed him on the cheek for good luck. He was floating on a cloud when he came to the opening. With the blanket slung over his shoulder, he cautiously lowered himself into the chasm once again.

This time he made his way carefully down the rope not trusting his own perception on the juttices.

For a length of time—a whole day must have passed it seemed—there was no appreciable difference in his eyesight. But by the second nightfall, he saw clear enough to climb up the side agilely. Yet for good measure he descended again for a third day. When he left that midnight he was as sharp as a cat.

Back at the cottage he bathed and shaved and went to bed quite pleased with himself. For now he knew that his surmise was correct. There was a special quality in the quartz at the bottom of the well. It acted as a stimulant to his eye nerves. Somehow he could enjoy Nature's maximum limit of physical sight and, he figured, an additional visional capacity in the realm of magic. The thought occurred to him that perhaps the darkness, the blackness itself, was largely the contributing factor to his eye strength. Whatever it was though, Wilbur Flinch possessed it. He would keep it and take care of it well. With this satisfying resolution, Wilbur sat up in bed and looked hard towards the part of the house concealing his beloved.

Without much strain he peered through several partitions, drank up a long look at her as she relaxed in sleep, then sank back on his pillow in the manner of a man who would be a king in the morning.

MRS. TURNER, the next morning, told him that his four new acquaintances had several times called upon him in his absence. Lucille had informed them he was out of town for a brief spell. His boss at the restaurant remarked that he hoped Wilbur's health were better. Lucille too, that evening, was happy he was back. She was anxious to tell him about his four callers. They had a business proposition for him.

Strange that anyone should have a business proposition for him at this time, Wilbur thought. It was after dinner and he was waiting for his callers who had left word they would be over to see him. It was coincidental, he told himself, coincidental because Wilbur was beginning to mull over in his mind just how he might be able to get ahead in the world a little faster than the pace he was moving now. How could a dishwasher ask a girl to marry him?

In this frame of mind, Wilbur looked forward to the visit by the four men a short time later.

Gaines and his aping trio filed into the parlor one by one.

"See that the door is locked," was Gaines' first utterance to one of his men, much to Wilbur's surprise.

Then the spokesman lost no time. In soft serious tones he commenced.

"We have a proposition that will make us all rich. Flinch, we like you and believe you'd make a good partner."

Wilbur's eyebrows went up questioningly. The leader continued.

"First we want your promise that you will never repeat what we have to say tonight."

All this prelude, swift and important, lent a great air of mystery to the entire project. Flinch was sufficiently impressed to fall in with almost any proposition.

Impatiently, Wilbur promised, "Sure. Okay."

Gaines unfolded the plan.

With Wilbur's ability, he could stand outside the bank at closing time and study the combination of the vault as the tellers opened the huge door, arranged the boxes and other trivia, then secured the safe for the night. He would report the combination to the thieving quartet, who would carry out a neat robbery. The same procedure could be used by Finch's magna-spying on merchants to find out the hidden places where they kept their receipts, on dowagers who deposited their jewels in their private wall-safes and on wealthy but miserly people who greedily saved their money in mattresses and other domestic hiding-places around their houses. In every case Flinch would supply the essential information, which he could easily procure, and the four partners would complete the job.

Wilbur was astounded by this proposal. When he seemed to hesitate they mistook his silence for doubt as to his own safety.

"Look, man, you won't be taking any risk at all. We'll do the tough part. All you do is to keep us posted, tell us where, when and what. Nothing will happen to you so you won't have a thing to worry about—except spending the dough."

Gaines waited for Wilbur's reply. When Flinch still remained silent in thought the leader pointed out that, if caught, the four partners and not Wilbur would be laid open to the danger of bullets and escapes from the police. Wilbur would be subject to nothing. The loot would be equally divided at the completion of each coup d'etat. As far as paying off was concerned, said Gaines, there would be a big profit be-

cause only the places with the most cash on hand would be their targets.

Wilbur said he wanted time to think the offer over. He was frankly startled. Somehow he called an end to the meeting and ushered the men out.

As he departed last, Gaines assured him they would return the next evening for their answer, which he was sure would be in the affirmative.

"You can't lose anything," were the spokesman's words.

Those words rang out in Wilbur's head as he tried to sleep that night. And his sleep was a fitful sleep.

On the one hand his thoughts marshalled strong reasons for his participation in the deal. On the other hand his conscience opposed the ratiocination. The mental conflict became a nervous conflict. Easy work, big money, fast riches — these were the thoughts which marched into his vision of thinking, like decorated soldiers. WRONG screamed his heart. His unconceding brain played an ace—he would be financially able to ask Lucille to marry him. WRONG screamed his heart again.

BY MORNING Flinch was ill but he had made up his mind.

When the four schemers arrived late that evening, anxious and almost confident that he would join them he politely but firmly refused to comply with their hopes, despite an offer of increased remuneration.

Finally the meeting took a nasty turn. The men stood up silently. They surrounded his chair. Gaines spoke:

"You are in love with the dame, the Turner dame, aren't you?"

Heatedly because of the unkind reference to Lucille, Wilbur stood up also.

"Yes I am," he admitted, although he did not see why he was disclosing this to these individuals.

"You wouldn't like to see any harm come to her, would you?" Gaines threatened.

"No, I would not!" Wilbur looked into the menacing faces of the others as the full impact of their meaning struck him.

"Then, Flinch, you had better play ball with us!"

He suddenly felt nauseous. He moved to leave the room for a glass of water.

Two of the men blocked his way.

"No, Flinch, you're staying here with us until you see it our way!"

Wilbur sat down heavily, with a sigh of resignation. Leaning forward in his chair he asked "What do you want me to do?"

"That's more like it," pronounced the spokesman, satisfied. He then signalled the rest to bring up their chairs closer around him while he outlined his first plan.

This apparently had been formulated in the twenty-four hour interval since their last visit. Wilbur was to walk leisurely by the bank. He was to take as much time as he needed to discover where easy-to-get funds were kept. He was to keep an eye on the vault to study the combination as the teller opened and closed it for the night. Having completed this part of his mission he was to meet his cohorts and to explain carefully, detail by detail, the whole set-up. They would then accomplish the robbery itself, convene at an old mine outside of town and divide the loot. Saturday was to be the day.

Until Saturday, Wilbur lived as if in a nightmare. His first thought was to bring the whole affair to the police. He realized he couldn't do this because he would sound like a madman.

Who would, at a first hearing, believe his fantastic tale of living in a well to improve his eyesight? The police would

want proof. This would take time, time in which his four coercers might escape. Meanwhile, harm might come to Lucille. The minute he tried something off the beaten track, he felt, they would take their revenge on her.

SATURDAY MORNING, bright and early, they were at his door. They waited without a word for him to wash and dress. Posted at the side of the bank a half hour later, he leaned against the lamp post with his hands in his pockets.

He felt disinclined to do the job. He strolled up and down the sidewalk without attempting to peer into the bank. Finally, the noon hour approached. People began arriving in a last-minute hustle to make their weekly deposits.

The thought of Lucille forced him to return to his stationary spot beside the lamp post. He raised his eyes finally, to go through with the ordeal.

But suddenly he squinted and rubbed his eyes. His extraordinary vision was failing him again. He could not see further than the tellers' cages and even that line of sight was blurred.

Glad, yet frightened at the consequences, he strode back to the cottage. As soon as he opened the parlor door, Gaines sprang to his feet.

"Have you got the information, Flinch?" he excitedly asked.

Wilbur was strangely happy at the turn of events. He replied simply, "No."

"Hey, don't try anything funny with us," Gaines coldly and deliberately said.

"But I'm not," he protested.

Wilbur offered explanations. He hadn't been equal to the task.

Their faces were cold and disbelieving. At length he convinced them that he needed a few days in the darkness at the bottom of the well.

"How long?" they petitioned. How long would it take the curative darkness to fortify his eyes for what they wanted? All four were questioning him.

Only a short time he pleaded. Secretly he hoped that the extra time would bring him the answer to his dilemma.

The stern faces went into conference on the other side of the room, now and then glancing in his direction.

"Okay," said the spokesman. They would see to it, though, that he played no tricks on them.

They would accompany him to his well-quarters. They would soon know whether he were lying to them and, if so, he could never again expect to see the light of day and his sweetheart.

Solemnly, later that day, the five of them hiked along the country road to the outskirts. Gaines carried a flashlight.

When Wilbur pointed out the well, one of them lowered himself cautiously by rope. Wilbur followed suit. Then the others followed.

Gaines descended last. As soon as his feet hit the ground he swung his flashlight into the circular eeriness of the place and then ordered his men to sit around Wilbur. Gaines took a few steps in one direction, then in another. Finally he was satisfied that there were no openings or underground tunnels leading away from the well. He, too, sat down next to Wilbur.

They sat that way for hours it seemed. Flinch was accustomed to making himself comfortable down there so it was an easy matter for him to curl up and fall asleep. But the others suspected he was shamming. They squirmed restlessly, occasionally getting up to stretch and walk a few steps. At about midnight, Wilbur opened his eyes just in time to see the flashlight fall from the limp hand of the spokesman who had begun to nod and breathe heavily. Then, from the stillness of the place, he suddenly knew that all four of his captors were sleeping.

HIS EYES were slightly improved now. He could see above him the juttices that he used as a natural ladder stairway. Slowly, slowly, he pushed himself across the floor towards that flashlight. If he could reach it and extinguish it, he might easily steal up the wall to freedom before his jailers could find their way in the dark.

His fingers closed over the oval object. All at once he felt a hard grip on his right leg and an accompanying husky warning was addressed to him, "No, you don't!"

The next second, there was a melee. Wilbur flung the flashlight from him. The shatter of glass and metal resounded like an explosion. A brutal shoe kicked him in the head. Bodies fell on him and on each other. The blackness was alive with cries and threats. He could see hands groping out to clutch him.

He was dizzy from the kick, frightened by the warm sticky stuff running down his face. He knew he was hurt but he was spurred on by the knowledge that his adversaries could not see in the dark and that he held the advantage over them.

His eyesight was still good enough for him to spot the remains of the flashlight on the ground.

Snatching the round handle of what was left of the gadget he wielded it wildly like a drunken man would wave an officer's nightstick. Soft thuds rewarded him and were the evidence that he had connected with damaging results.

Two of the men were still grappling with each other on the floor while Wilbur, his head swimming with pain, mounted the wallstair. He remembered stumbling down the road into the town and he remembered collapsing at the door of the cottage.

He awakened in a white stillness. It took him a few minutes to realize that he was in the hospital and another minute to realize that the tightness around his head was a heavy bandage. It was high noon before his thoughts were answered by Lucille.

She came through the doorway and she never looked more beautiful. After her, came Mrs. Turner.

"How are you, darling?" She sat on one side of his bed and her aunt on the other.

"We heard you moaning on the doorstep. Lucille and I carried you inside and called Doctor Forbes. But that was three days ago," Mrs. Turner told him.

"You've been in a coma all that time," Lucille offered, "and you're past danger but you've got to stay in bed for awhile."

"But what —" he began.

"If you are wondering about those four ruffians, you need not bother your head. They are locked up," the old lady cut in.

The police, explained Lucille, had been questioning Lucille on the porch about Wilbur's injury when the four tattered and bruised boarders were seen entering their house.

THEY were taken into custody and one of them finally broke down and admitted that they had kidnapped Wilbur. Among their belongings were discovered marked money which proved several local crimes against them and so no time was lost—they were all imprisoned that morning.

First day out Wilbur and Lucille started up the road to visit the well.

"How can I explain it? How can I explain the influence of a well on my eyes?" Wilbur wondered out loud.

Lucille didn't help. "People will think you are out of your mind if you tell the whole story," she offered.

And he knew in his heart that she was

right.

This was an overwhelming problem. If he told the authorities about the marvelous powers of the well, he took the chance of being stamped as a queer one. If, accidentally, the powers of the well were discovered to be fact, there would be a stampede to the cavern by people with poor eyesight.

Wilbur was uncomfortable. He felt strongly that he possessed a secret that did not belong to man. It belonged to Divinity and he had stumbled on it by some privilege of Fate.

Had he the right to expose it to the uses of society?

Sorely troubled by this ruminating he approached the object of his awesome thoughts.

He looked upon a busy scene. He held Lucille's hand tightly. For, where the well had been, now there was a large excavation. Men were breaking rocks into small chunks. A steam-shovel was spooning up the earth and depositing it in piles, like a pre-historic monster.

A large signboard blaringly informed passersby that a new schoolhouse was being erected on that site!

About six months passed before the pair visited the new edifice. Mr. and Mrs. Flinch saw a magnificent brick structure. Mrs. Flinch visualized in her mind's eye a young Wilbur playing in the schoolyard.

Mr. Flinch, now manager of the restaurant, saw something else.

He saw in his mind's eye a message and it came from a source unfathomable by man. It was an age-old precept that he recalled: God's Will is made known to man in many mysterious ways.

And Wilbur smiled, because he, for one, knew it was true.

ROCKET MAIL

★ **By Frances Yerxa** ★

AT LONG LAST it has happened! There's been no big blurb, no huge publicity campaign to attract attention. All that has appeared is a small column hidden back in the files of the newspapers.

What makes it maddening to any dyed-in-the-wool reader of fantasy and science-fiction, is that such an important event receives so little national acclaim. It has been announced that within a short while, a matter of months, the authorities are introducing rocket mail between a couple of southwestern cities with the intention of eventually establishing the service on a nation-wide scale!

If such an announcement had appeared ten years ago, the world would have been in an uproar. But now, everyone is so blase, that it doesn't even make a ripple on the surface of human affairs.

The plan is this: rockets are on the boards and in various stages of manufacture. These rockets will not be equipped with warheads. Instead, the space ordinarily allotted to explosives is being used for storage space and mail will be placed here.

The rockets will set in suitable launching racks, touched off and sent hurtling into the sky. While the rockets will have been aimed specifically at their objectives, additional provision has been made for remote control through radio devices. Upon arriving at the targets for which they have been aimed, the fuel supply to the rocket motors will be cut off, and of course the rocket will start to drop. It is then that a special gadget flips out a parachute of the "ribbon-type" which will effectively and safely lower the rocket to the Earth.

Incidentally, the ribbon parachute is a development of the Germans which we have, with the aid of their scientists, improved upon. It is much like a conventional parachute except, that it is studded with holes that permit air to flow through them. This allows the parachute to drop straighter without whipping about so eccentrically as does a conventional parachute. This is extremely important when it is the desire to land supplies or equipment to a given area. It can be done quite accurately using tbe ribbon parachute.

The rocket mail will arrive at the desired destination then very accurately because of the method of control coupled with the use of the ribbon parachute.

It won't be long, it is a safe prediction to make, before rocket mail will be a common sight all over the U. S. Not only is it practical to send concentrated valuable commodities like mail by rocket, but it is feasible economically. In addition there is another point of value. Much extremely useful data will be garnered by such experiments. Rockets and their behavior are not too well known now. If rocket flying is practiced on such a large practical scale vast amounts of Information will be accumulated.

Another important use of rockets besides for mail, is the meteorological end. Knowledge of weather data is of the utmost importance in every way and the facilities available for its gathering are not common nor easily used. The rocket will completely replace the meteorological balloon, carrying radiosonde equipment as is used today to gather weather information from the upper atmosphere.

The rockets will be just like the others except that they will carry the compact radio transceiver that present-day radiosondes are. A radiosonde consists of instruments for measuring temperature, density, and humidity. The output of these instruments—electrical of course—is fed to suitable amplifying sections of the radio transmitter that makes up the bulk of the radiosonde. It is fed in the form of coded dots and dashes. The transmitter in the nose of the rocket automatically broadcasts this information to a receiver back on Earth where it is automatically recorded. All that remains for the meteorologist is to read the slips of paper on which the data appears.

At last the rocket is being applied to useful purposes like mail transmission, weather work, and perhaps shortly—even transportation.

It is not necessary to be imaginative to realize that it won't be long before passenger flights with rockets will be an accomplished thing.

Is there no limit?

ANIMAL WORSHIP

★ By Jon Barry ★

THE respect primitive man had for the animals which constantly threatened his life led to the early belief in animal worship. He attributed greater strength and courage than he himself possessed to the animal and believed that the soul could exist in another being long after the animal's death.

Many of the tribes inhabiting the Old and New World worshipped the animals closest to them and adopted their names. The longevity of this superstition is found in the names of the many constellations bearing the names of these animals.

Earliest animal worship, of historical founding, is recorded in Greek history. In this form of animal worship, the Minotaur, a monster possessed of a head of a bull and a body of a man was idolized. At prescribed times the citizens of Athens offered seven youths and seven maidens to appease the god and keep his favor. Later, European animal worshippers adopted the veneration of the werewolf. It was reported that by some magical ointment the animal was able to continue his evil life in a human being long after the animal had died. Present evidence of animal worship is found in the powers attributed to the totem, a replica of various animals revered by the Indian tribes. Of course, the strictest observance of animal worship, today, is found in the sacredness associated with the cow in India.

* * *

HOLY RIVER

★ By June Lurie ★

THE GANGES is India's holy river. It is also probably the dirtiest river in the world. For many miles on each side are the bathing ghats and wide steps coming down into the water. Above them are temples of various gods and palaces of kings. Beyond them are very narrow filthy streets which connect the bathing ghats. Each ghat and temple is built differently and dedicated to a different god. Five of these ghats are especially holy and millions of pilgrims immerse in each successively on the same day. Some temples were built in honor of monkeys and others, to "Ganesh," which is a red idol with three eyes, an elephant's trunk, a silver cap, and riding on the back of a rat. These ghats are always filled with hundreds of people who are eager to swarm down into the filthy—but purifying—water. To the Indians it seems that the dirtier a thing becomes, the more holy it is.

The water of the Ganges flows slowly and is muddy to begin with, and then all the sewers of the city are emptied into it, and all the dead who are too poor to afford a pile of wood to burn them with are thrown into it. Anyone who dies of a dread disease such as leprosy or smallpox is considered unworthy of cremation and they are thrown into the river. The Indians believe that this holy river is so powerful that it purifies everything instantly, and that nothing, no matter how foul, can contaminate it.

★ ★ ★

The PRUNING MAN

By Robert Moore Williams

Eliminating evil was a special kind of work, needing a special kind of person. It was the *pruning man's* job . . .

HE stood by the workbench where his elaborate photographic equipment was assembled, a tall slender man, with black hair and black eyes. It came to him quickly, suddenly, out of nowhere, in a flashing of light from some dark beyond—*death was here in this room.*

Here in this laboratory, he had seen many sights, had heard many sounds, in the nights that had passed since he had been helping Carson, head of the psychology department, with his series of psychic experiments—sights and sounds odd enough and strange enough to send shivers down the spine of the toughest-minded skeptic who ever lived—but he had never felt anything like this sudden feeling of impending death. The old man with the scythe, the dark camel, the black angel of the lord, Death itself with the big D, was here in this quiet laboratory. He felt it, sensed it, perceived it intuitively, knew it, but could not tell how he knew it. But it was here, Death with the big D. He glanced quickly up from the camera he was adjusting at the others in the room.

Carson, thin and slender and with the appearance of a hot-headed fanatic turned into cold scientist, was talking, with much waving of his hands, to Dr. Hill. Dr. Hill was a psychiatrist, an analyst of the Freudian school, calm and unemotional. Both were top men in their lines. Carson shrugged at some comment of Hill and Rob Eden did not catch his reply. His eyes went on to the girl.

Jane Ricchi was relaxing easily in a soft chair, her pale beauty glowing in the semi-darkened room, resting in preparation for the ordeal that was to come. She was a medium and it was through her that most of the phenomena that this laboratory had seen had been produced. As he watched, she suddenly lifted her head and looked around, as if at some sound she had heard. Her eyes met his and she smiled, then looked around again, searching for a sound she seemed to be hearing. She got quickly to her feet and came across the room to him. Her gaze searched his face.

"Rob, is something wrong?"

He was ill at ease. One was very careful about his words around this group because his words might be misinterpreted and a hidden meaning read into them. One was exceedingly careful about reporting such things as sudden hunches, because sudden hunches was one of the things they were investigating. And the feeling that death was here was a hunch. "Nothing, Jane," he said.



An invisible hand poised itself in the air as Roger Burls advanced with the knife . . .

She didn't believe him. "There *is* something," she insisted.

He shrugged and told her about his hunch. Her eyes widened. "That is very strange."

"Why is it strange?"

"Because I just had the same feeling," she answered. "I also had another feeling, that something was opening up my mind, like you open a book, to look inside and read what was written there."

"Uh?" he said. He could feel gooseflesh rising on his body. And—somewhere near him he was aware of a feeling of cold. "Do you feel that?" he whispered. "There's a cold center near."

Her nod was almost imperceptible. Color began to drain away from her face. "There's something here, Rob," she whispered, from suddenly bloodless lips. "It's solid, like a beta body. I can feel it. It's to my right, toward Carl and Dr. Hill."

Wordlessly, he gestured toward the psychologist and the psychiatrist. They came quickly. "There's a cold spot here," he told them. Carson passed his hand over the area Eden indicated. "Yes. I can feel it."

The cold spot was about three feet from the workbench and it extended from about a foot above the floor to roughly the same height as their heads. They explored it carefuly with their hands, and it seemed to tolerate them, to accept them. In general outline it was roughly the shape of a human body. Carson thought he could feel extensions that were hands. "I've never seen this happen except as a result of a trance state," the psychologist muttered. "Um. It's going away."

WHILE they waited and tried to watch—seeing nothing because there was nothing to see—the cold area went the same way it had come, silently and invisibly. As it went, Rob Eden had the impression that death had looked into the laboratory and had gone away, temporarily, on other business, an impression that he kept strictly to himself. His flesh reflected the feeling of cold long after the cold area was gone. Jane Ricchi watched him thoughtfully, seeming to sense the way he felt, and other feelings in him as well. He knew deep in his heart, that he was in love with her and he wondered if she knew it. He knew, also, that he didn't have a chance of winning her, not against the overwhelming personality of Roger Burls.

Carson, putting the cold area out of his mind, glanced at his watch. "What's keeping Roger and Fred?" he wondered aloud. "They're late."

As he spoke there was a knock on the door and Roger Burls entered. He had a great mop of black hair that he was always tossing out of his eyes and a warped face and a superior manner of speaking that Rob Eden, at least, found offensive. The son of a rich man, with more money than was good for him, Eden had always suspected that Burls had little real interest in the psychic experiments undertaken here, that the man's only real interest was in himself, and in Jane Ricchi. Burls brought with him the odor of whiskey.

"Well, I'm here. Let's get started." He came over to Jane Ricchi. "Hi, honey." He put his arm around her.

Her manner was that of a bird charmed by a snake, wanting to break away, knowing there is death waiting if she doesn't break away, but held from breaking away by some psychic force. She made no effort to resist him. "Hello, Roger." Her voice was very low.

"Let's get started," Burls said to Carson.

"We're waiting on Fred," the psy-

chologist answered.

Irritation showed on Burls' face. "Is he late? Hell, we don't need him. Let's get started anyhow."

"We'll wait a little longer," Carson said. "He has a genuine interest in these experiments and I'm sure he would be hurt if we started without him."

Eden suspected that Carson was resisting the impulse to tell Burls to get out and stay out. Burls had supplied the money to buy part of the equipment of the laboratory and he felt this fact entitled him to privileges. He made his contribution known in many nasty little ways while they waited for red-headed Fred McCann, who had supplied nothing but a sunny disposition but who was liked by everybody, except Roger Burls.

"How much have you had to drink?" Dr. Hill asked Burls.

"Is that any of your business, Doc?"

"It is none of my business," the psychiatrist answered, with no show of emotion. "But I think the fact that one member of the group was somewhat intoxicated should show on the records."

"Show it then," Burls answered, indifferently. "Personally, I think this show you're putting on here is more poppycock than anything else."

"Why do you participate in it if you think it is poppycock?" Carson asked.

"I have a reason," Burls answered. His eyes went again, possessively, to Jane Ricchi.

Burls had brought disquiet with him and the group was uneasy and tense. Carson turned abruptly away from him and Dr. Hill went over to talk to Jane. Left with no one else to talk to, Burls hung around Eden. "Do you think you'll get any ghosts tonight?" he questioned.

"I don't know," Eden answered, annoyed. "I'm going to use the infra-red flood light tonight and the new film sensitive to that light. I may get something, I may not."

"Bet you you don't," Burls said.

"What's eating you?" Eden asked.

"Eating me? Nothing is eating me. Are you—"

"I'm not trying to start an argument," Eden answered. Burls grunted and said, "Any time you want to start one, you can start it. I don't like you."

"I think you don't like anybody," Eden said.

BURLS looked at his platinum wrist watch. "Where in the hell is McCann? Damn it, my time is valuable. I can't spend all night waiting for somebody who has no sense of time to put in an appearance. Why can't we go on without him?"

"Because he knows shorthand," Eden answered, although he knew Burls knew the reason perfectly well.

"The wire recorder does the job better than he does," Burls answered.

"If something should happen to the recorder, we might need him," Eden said. As he spoke he was aware of two sensations, the first that the door was opening silently, and the second that he was feeling cold again. An invisible draft of cold air seemed to surge through the room. Then he saw that the door was actually opening and behind it he saw the grinning face of McCann.

"Hi, everybody," McCann called. "Sorry I kept you waiting but I was held up."

"It's all right, Fred," Carson answered. "We didn't mind waiting."

"I minded it," Burls said. "I minded it like the devil. I wish you would try to get here on time, McCann."

Leaning against the workbench, Burls was holding a bronze letter opener in his right hand. He glowered at Mc-

Cann, who grinned at him. "I see you're in your usual good humor, Rog."

The remark seemed to irritate Burls, who rose from the workbench and walked toward McCann. "Maybe you don't like my usual humor?" His tone was nasty. Hearing it, Rob Eden had the urge to smack the man. McCann grinned at him, indifferent to the tone and to the speaker. "Let's get going," he said. "I have the feeling we are going to dig up something important tonight."

Burls rocked on his feet, glaring at McCann, who ignored him and began to arrange the chair for Jane Ricchi. For an instant, Eden thought Burls was going to spring at McCann. Burls rocked back and forth, the bronze letter opener gripped in his hand like a hunting knife, and Eden had a glimpse of the sullen, neurotic personality under the surface of the man. He saw, also, that Dr. Hill was watching Burls closely, like a doctor studying a patient, his face grave and tense. He spoke to the physician. "What do you think?"

"Eh?" Dr. Hill said, a little startled at the question. "I don't know, Rob. I'm afraid the man is paranoid and a menace, to himself and to others. You understand," he added quickly, "this is just between us."

"Of course," Eden answered. He moved away to operate his photographic and wire-recording equipment. Still pictures would be taken at 30-second intervals during the entire seance and the wire recorder would be in operation, catching all sounds in the room. Carson was already preparing Jane Ricchi for the part she would play, seeing she was comfortable in the big chair, preparing her to go into the trance from which she would report back—what?

Although he had seen this scene often enough for it to have become commonplace, he still got a thrill out of it, a nameless, weird sensation that here a window was being opened into other worlds, into other universes. Although the lights were dim, there was plenty of illumination in the big laboratory and he could see clearly. Carson looked like an ordinary mortal and Jane Ricchi looked like—a very beautiful woman. Possibly she resembled a woman having trouble with her eyes for the blindfold that Carson was putting on her face vaguely resembled a bandage, but she was still a woman in spite of the blindfold, human, warm, lovable. Yet Eden knew that in different times and different places in the history of the world, the psychologist would have been called a witch doctor, a worker in black magic, and would have been burned at the stake because of the experiments being undertaken here. Cotton Mather, for one, would have smote him hip and thigh. And Jane Ricchi and everyone else in the room would have stood an excellent chance of going to the stake with Carson, for their part in what would have been—and in some quarters was still—regarded as a sinister business.

FOR this group was exploring another world, possibly another universe, possibly a new and different aspect of one world, of one universe. Under controlled, scientific conditions, they were trying to reach out into the vast realm that for lack of a better word is called the spirit world—vague words that inadequately express a tremendous concept. Carson and the group working with him here were trying to take some of the vagueness out of these words, trying to give them concrete meaning, trying to explore the world beyond, trying to find out if there were such things as ghosts and if raps sometimes did come from the spirit world.

"Ready?" Carson asked softly, his voice gentle and soothing. Jane nodded. He pressed his hand against her forehead and she went instantly into a trance. She was an experienced subject and she had complete confidence in Carson, knowing the psychologist was not only an honest man but was a sincere seeker after truth. Trusting him completely, she went directly into the trance state. Carson glanced at Eden, to see if the photographic and recording equipment was in operation, and Eden nodded. The recorder turned with a slight hum, the automatic camera clicked softly as it took a picture every thirty seconds. Carson moved away from the girl in the chair, lit a cigarette. Dr. Hill and Fred McCann were watching quietly. Burls leaned against the work bench, sullen and vaguely suspicious, as though he sensed an enemy here and could not discover exactly who the enemy was.

In her chair, Jane Ricchi stirred restlessly. "I'm frightened," she said.

"So am I," Burls spoke.

"Quiet, please," Carson requested.

The room was quiet. Off somewhere a night cruising taxi honked for a fare, an earthen note totally unlike horns from fairyland. Rob Eden felt Dr. Hill's eyes on him. "That's the first time I ever heard her say she was frightened," the doctor whispered. Eden nodded. The girl spoke again, reporting a scene she was not seeing with her eyes. "There is confusion over here. And fear. So much fear it is overwhelming. They're acting like—" She hesitated, groping for a word or a phrase to convey the impression she was receiving—"like children at a picnic who have seen a mad dog and are in panic at the sight."

Rob Eden got a clear picture of fear—a dog suffering from hydrophobia was the classic symbol of fear. He knew the words and the phrases were coming from Jane's mind, from her background, from the words she knew, and he knew they represented an attempt to translate into language an experience that was probably not translatable. In the spirit world there were certainly no mad dogs. But there might be something that would excite as much fear as the hydrophobic beast.

"What are they afraid of? Carson questioned.

"I don't know," the answer came. "They're too excited to tell me, too excited even to notice me. They're running around like people at a fire. I can't reach them, can't get them to talk. Oooh, I'm scared!" She twisted in her chair. "Bring me back. Please, please, bring me back."

Carson moved toward her, to bring her out of the trance, but McCann got ahead of him. "We're here, Jane." The voice of the red-head was a soothing, gentle whisper. "There's nothing to be afraid of. We're here with you."

"Fred?" The single word was a question. "Where's Fred?"

"I'm here," McCann answered. "We're all here. We're watching over you, Jane."

Her fear seemed to leave her. "That's good. As long as all of you are with me, I know I'm all right."

McCann drew back and Burls, who had started forward, leaned back against the bench. Nervously he twisted the letter opener in his hands.

"Are you all right, Jane?" Carson spoke.

"Quite all right now."

"Can you tell us what you are seeing?"

"I see the same world you see, except it's wonderfully enlarged and broadened, and I see it with new and different senses. Objects that you call matter, I

see as hazy blurs, not as matter at all. Many vibrations that you call light are more material to me than matter, to my different senses."

IT WAS the old, eternally the same but eternally different attempt to describe the world beyond. And like all attempts that depend on words, it was more of a failure than a success.

"Oh!" she spoke quickly. "I'm in contact with Amiel. He's noticed me."

There was silence and in that silence Eden got the impression that a conference was taking place, that questions were being asked and answered.

"Amiel says," Jane spoke sharply, "That the pruning man is there."

"Eh?" Carson said. "The pruning man?"

"Yes, yes." The voice was impatient with the necessity of saying quickly what had to be said. "This has been discussed before. On your world, life forms occasionally mutate and go astray, developing rank, wild growth. Cancer is an illustration of what I mean. Normal cells suddenly go crazy and begin to spread and multiply, threatening the life of the individual, cutting short his life and the work he will do in that life. The cancer cells must be cut out, the rank growth must be removed, cut back. There are forces assigned to remove these cancerous growths, to cut them out, to prune back the wild, rank growth, so there may be orderly development in the life patterns assigned to earth."

"Forces assigned to remove the cancerous growth?" Carson questioned, in a whisper. He seemed dazed, unsure of himself. "I don't understand about them. Can you ask?"

Again the wordless conference went on between the girl and—whatever she was talking to. "Nor are they understood over here," her answer came. "Amiel says he just knows they exist but that they operate on a higher level than his and that they take their orders from a higher level still, levels that he cannot begin to reach as yet."

Rob Eden got a glimpse then of a terrifying vista, of level rising on level up to the sky itself and beyond the sky, and of forces operating through these levels. He wondered how much of a true picture she was putting into words. Was she being misled? He had every confidence in her integrity and in the integrity of Carson, but were they being deceived? He didn't, couldn't, know. The question was as old as the Witch of Endor and had never known a completely satisfactory answer. But the glimpse was a terrifying thing and at the same time somehow reassuring

"*Stop it!*" another voice was suddenly loud in the room. Burls' voice lifted in a shout. "She's lying!" Letter opener in hand, he started across the room. In the chair, Jane Ricchi screamed.

"Watch him!" she whispered. "Don't—don't let him come near me!"

"Stand back, Roger," Carson ordered.

"Back, hell!" Burls answered. Fear was on the face of the man, fear so great it distorted his countenance, unreasoning fear, blind fear, fear that knew no source but was even stronger because of that. He lunged toward the girl. Carson tried to get in his way and was shoved aside. It was big Fred McCann who caught him.

"Easy, Roger," McCann said.

BUT Burls was beyond listening. Light glinted dully from the blade of the letter opener. McCann caught his wrist. They wrestled. Eden, Carson, Hill, started toward them.

"*You!*" Burls screamed at McCann, as if in recognition. He seemed to go

crazy. Jerking his arm free, he struck at McCann with the letter opener. "It's you!" he screamed.

McCann caught the arm that held the descending blade. With an easy movement, he deflected the point of the knife. The blade went down through the top of Burls' chest, sank in through cloth and muscle, buried itself up to the hilt. Burls screamed again.

During the war, Rob Eden had heard men scream like that, a sound that had only one meaning. He knew now for a certainty what he had felt earlier in the evening—there was death here in this laboratory.

Blood gouted from Burls' chest. McCann released him. He stumbled to one knee, reached for the letter opener, jerked it from his chest. It fell to the floor and he fell with it.

In the heavy silence the click of the automatic camera was clearly audible, that and the soft sobbing of Jane Ricchi. Then Dr. Hill was speaking, his voice cold and unemotional. "That was very close to murder, Fred."

"He struck at me," McCann said.

"Yes. But you deliberately deflected that knife into his heart. You could have held his arm."

McCann shrugged. "I think you will decide it was suicide," he said.

"Eh?" Hill was shocked.

McCann seemed to consider some inner problem, and to solve it. "Yes, I think, all things considered, you will prefer to report it to the police—as suicide."

He turned and walked calmly to the door. Eden had a glimpse of his red head disappearing as the door closed, and of his face. McCann's face was suddenly grave and thoughtful and old—old, old, old—and Eden had the impression that a mask of cheerfulness had been finally dropped.

THERE were two sounds in the laboratory, one of Jane Ricchi ripping off her blindfold and the other of the muted ringing of the telephone in the adjoining room that Carson used as a den and office.

"McCann killed him," Carson whispered. "Fred McCann!" He seemed in a daze, his eyes going from the body on the floor to the door through which McCann had departed.

"I suppose we have to call the police," Dr. Hill said. "Fred will have to be arrested and stand trial." He passed a hand over his face. "I hate to do it but it has to be done."

Death had come suddenly into this room and had left Roger Burls behind it. Probably no one present, in his deep heart, cared that Burls was dead. But the publicity would be bad and Professor Carson might easily lose his job over this, experiments with the occult not being in favor with boards of curators.

The phone stopped ringing.

Carson, reacting automatically, had already started to answer it but it stopped before he reached it, then started again, as though the person on the other end of the wire knew there was someone present here and was determined to have the phone answered. They heard him answer it, his voice coming back through the door he had left open, then they heard him say, sharply: "Fred! Where are you?"

"McCann calling back," Hill said absently. Eden scarcely heard him. He had gone to Jane Ricchi and was trying to comfort her.

"What?" Carson's voice lifted in a shout. "You're in the hospital? Fred, damn you—" His voice dropped down. Eden got to his feet. He and Hill looked at each other, questions in their eyes. "All right, all right," they heard Carson

say. Then he hung up and they heard him begin to dial the phone. His voice was muffled and they could not understand what he was saying. When he came into the room his face was white and his eyes dilated.

"That was Fred McCann on the phone," he said. "He said he had been trying to reach us but that we hadn't answered. Did either of you hear the phone ringing? I'm certain I didn't."

"No," they said together. "Where is he?" Hill asked, reluctantly.

"In the hospital," Carson answered. "He said he was hit by a car on the way here tonight. Nothing serious but the driver took him to the hospital and the doctors are holding him for possible concussion. He said he was sorry he hadn't been with us tonight."

"Uh?" Hill grunted, a whispered sound that was barely audible. "But—but—" He fumbled for words to express his confusion, to hide the horrible fear in his own mind. "But he *was* here. We all saw him." He looked at Rob Eden and Jane Ricchi. "We saw him. We know he was here. He—" His eyes came to rest on the body of Roger Burls.

Carson spoke very slowly. "I called the hospital for verification. Fred McCann is there. They described him to me, exactly. He has been there for over an hour and he was brought in by a motorist who struck him. They have the name of the motorist."

"This," the doctor shouted, "is an outrage. He was here. We can prove he was here." He looked at Bob Eden. "Damn it, if somebody was trying to play a practical joke on us—"

EDEN was already moving toward the work bench, shutting off the automatic camera. With suddenly shaking fingers, he snipped the roll of film, lifted out the film holder. An adjoining room had been fitted up as a dark room for the prompt development of negatives exposed at these seances. He went into the dark room, Hill, Carson and Jane Ricchi following him like automatons. Under the dim glow of the red light, he ran the film through the developing baths, closely watched the pictures come to light.

Dr. Hill was clearly revealed in the negatives. Jane Ricchi was visible, Roger Burls, Carson, Rob Eden, were all on the film. But Fred McCann was not there.

"Damn it," Dr. Hill whispered. "We saw him."

"We saw something or thought we saw something," Bob Eden said. "But the film didn't see what we did."

There was silence in the room. One by one they examined the negatives, satisfied themselves that the film recorded nothing of what they had thought was Fred McCann. The silence grew. "What was it we saw?" Carson asked.

They looked at each other uneasily. Outside the laboratory a night bird called. There was no other sound. Each knew in his secret heart that here in this laboratory a veil had been lifted for an instant, a window had opened into the world beyond. "They were greatly excited," Jane Ricchi whispered. "Excited and scared. They talked about something they called the pruning man —"

"Um," Carson said, uneasily.

"Look here," Eden spoke. "Look at this series of pictures." He pointed to the strip of film. The camera had caught Burls' death. The film clearly revealed him leaping forward, revealed him waving the letter opener in his hand, revealed him, finally, plunging the letter opener into his own heart.

There was no evidence on the film of Fred McCann deflecting the arm that held the letter opener. So far as the film was concerned, McCann wasn't

present.

"He said we would report it as suicide," Hill whispered huskily.

THE REPORT that went into the police files was—death by suicide during a period of mental despondency. Dr. Hill, as an expert, could and did testify that Burls was paranoid. The police, and the world, accepted his testimony without question. Murder would have caused a terrific stir. But suicide—well everybody who knew Roger Burls said he was headed in that direction anyhow and that the world was better off without him in it.

Only one fact was clear: Roger Burls was dead. And only Rob Eden and Jane Ricchi ever grasped the why of his death.

"He fascinated me," the girl explained to Rob Eden much later. "I can't explain his control over me any more than a bird can explain the control of the snake over it. If he had lived, he would have forced me to marry him, and then he would have deserted me."

"What?" Rob Eden gasped.

"And I would have committed suicide, instead of him," she went on.

He looked closely at her, saw that she had gone into a trance of her own will. Her words came again, as from a vast distance.

"So he was eliminated, for us."

"For us?" he whispered.

She nodded. Again her voice came from a vast distance. "Our grandson will be a very great scientist," she said. "He will be famous, he will remake the world, and because of him, millions will live in the world of tomorrow. Burls was eliminated today, so that millions might live tomorrow."

Her voice went into silence. Eden, awed, whispered. "Do you mean that something looked down across time and saw what would happen if Burls was allowed to live, and deliberately eliminated him, for the sake of a grandson who will be born someday?"

"Yes," she whispered.

Eden shivered. There was terror in this moment, terror in this glimpse into a realm as yet barely touched by science. Forces reaching across time, moulding, controlling, the lives of human beings, pruning back the rank growth, yes there was terror in this glimpse across tremendous vistas. Terror, and something of comfort. He was not alone. Something moved with him, watching him, standing ward over him. There was comfort in the thought. The girl sighed, and moved closer to him.

TELEVISED SURGERY

★ By A. MORRIS ★

RENOWNED doctors performed seven unusual major operations in a New York hospital ln one day recently. Their work was televised to groups of surgeons in different parts of our nation. They could observe the operations as well as if they had been standing by the table. A television camera had been mounted above the operating table and a narrator stood by his microphone giving a "play by play" description of the job. The surgeon added a few comments. This new development in the use of television means that medical students all over the world will have the privilege of watching the most eminent surgeons at work without leaving their classrooms.

PARATROOPER DOGS

★ By L. A. BURT ★

A FORMER paratrooper in Virginia is training dogs to jump from airplanes with parachutes. Some of the dogs love to jump and can hardly wait to step out the door. They land in the deep snow that cushions their fall so that they are not hurt. These dogs are being trained for the purpose of rescuing fliers that have been forced down in Arctic regions. The dogs are being trained by the U.S. Air Force in Goose Bay, Labrador. The plan is to drop the dogs, then the dog sleds and medical supplies, and food. Although the dogs are not as yet trained to give first aid, they can pull the stranded fliers to safety.

READER'S PAGE

HE'S BEEN WAITING

Sirs:

Congrats on the May issue of FA. I have been waiting for a story like "Forgotten Worlds" for a long time, and there it was, in the May issue. If you get Chandler to write more stories, I'll pay your income tax buying FA. A great yarn.

Normally I prefer to have a few more stories per issue, but your four-star lineup in the May issue packed a terrific punch.

I noticed in the Reader's section that one fan referred to FA as a science-fiction mag while another reader referred to it as a fantasy mag. Which is it?

L. Smith, Jr.,
410 Memorial Dr.,
Cambridge 39, Mass.

We're glad you liked Larry Chandler's novel so well, and as to your last question, well, that's a good question. If you worked on the premise that science-fiction was fantastic, along with straight fantasy, then the mag would be straight fantasy. But many readers like to make a distinction between the two, and we like to reach a happy balance with them. How about it, gang? ....Ed.

NOT INCREDIBLE WHEELS

Sirs:

Have just concluded reading "Forgotten Worlds" in the May issue of FA. Lawrence Chandler sure writes a very good story, exciting and enjoyable from start to finish. Let's have more of Larry's work. The short stories were also interesting.

The feature, "Impossible But True" about the "Incredible Wheels" seems to have happened this way to me: The ship pushing through a cross current set up a drag on the screws, causing a whirlpool to form on either side of her, and it being a very dark night, phosphorous, swirled around in the whirlpool created the illusion seen. While in the Navy, aboard ship on some very dark nights, I have observed action of the same kind but on a much smaller scale.

Well, until next issue . . .

Tom Brewer,
1041 Willard Ave.,
Glendale 1, Cal.

Your observation on the wheels is quite interesting, Tom. All we can say is, maybe you're right. ....Ed.

HE'S BEEN OVERWHELMED

Sirs:

It's been some time since I've written to you, but at last you have overwhelmed me! Although my last letter was not printed, you certainly heeded my request for book-length novels and four in a row at that? And what novels they were!

"Forgotten Worlds" is, without the slightest shadow of a doubt the best novel you have ever printed. In fact, next to "The Green Man" it is the best fantasy novel I have ever read.

"The Black Arrow," while rather confusing at first, turned out to be very absorbing. I thrilled at the beautiful descriptive phrases. Your new authors are very good.

"Queen of the Panther World" is the first really great story that Livingston has written. I liked it.

"The Man From Yesterday" coupled with "Zero A.D." has at last put Lee Francis among the top ten writers. Too bad the author had to kill Avar though . . .

And a Wilcox novel next month! What more could I ask for?

The cover for the "Black Arrow" is the best since January. I hope Jones returns again next month.

Here's how I rate the authors:

1. Don Wilcox.
2. Richard S. Shaver.
3. Rog Phillips.
4. Lee Francis.
5. Chester S. Geier.
6. Berkeley Livingston.
7. Harold M. Sherman. (He's dropped because he hasn't written lately.)
8. Robert Bloch (When will he write again?)
9. Dwight V. Swain (Slow writer?)
10. William Lawrence Hamling (Still clinging to the hope that he'll write again.)

I hope the paper shortage will be over soon so we can have a big format again.

In closing, more stories by Richard Casey; hurry up with "Toffee"; and tell Geier to hurry up too . . .

Burnett Toskey,
Rt. 1, Box 18A,
Coupeville, Wash.

Many thanks for your nice letter, and all we've got to say is we hope the paper shortage ends soon too. ....Ed.

TEA-SIPPER'S DRUDGERY

Sirs:

Your May issue contained two stories, either of which would have been worth twice the price of the magazine.

I choose not to mention the insignificant tea-sipper's drudgery of Lawrence Chandler's "Forgotten Worlds." This will lay in the land of Forgotten Pulps, I am sure.

The two I meant are: "The Watching Eyes" by Robert Moore Williams, an extremely unusual little story, having something from psychiatry and something from imagination mixed into it with just the right amount of wordage to be effective.

Williams has written what will doubtless become a classic short story, and will be included in more and more anthologies as public interest in fantasy is awakened.

The second story is, of course, "My World Died Tonight" by Richard Casey. It reminds me of the brilliant "The Celestial Omnibus" and in spots it is even more sensitive. Casey has written an appealing story, very cleverly. with the exactly correct tone ending in this sentence: "Bobby's world died tonight," she said softly. "We'll have to make this new world a fine, safe place for him to live in."

Chandler proves you pay by the word; but the above two named prove you are also willing to use the off-trail and the beautiful. Please continue.

Russell Harold Woodman,
505 Washington Ave.,
Apt. 7,
Portland, Maine.

We must say, Russ, we were mighty surprised to hear that you didn't like "Forgotten Worlds" at all. But as to the other two yarns you mentioned, yep, they sure were a couple of humdingers. And just watch coming issues for more like them. ....Ed.

OH, BUT THAT ENDING!

Sirs:

Just a few well chosen words from one of your female fans. I have been reading FA for a long time and up to now have never even considered beefing about a story. I guess in reality you could not really call this a beef, because I did enjoy the story up to the last sentence. I'm speaking of "The Man From Yesterday" by Lee Francis. I stayed up until 2 a.m. to finish the story—and then came that last sentence.

How could Lee Francis do that to us poor readers? I had things all planned out and fixed up for poor lost Avar and what did he do? Just when he should, after all the troubles he had, woo and win the lovely Lauren, what happened? "And very slowly life left him." The End. Now I ask you, is that nice? I was terribly disappointed when he bumps the guy blooey just like that. I was willing to have the police chase him a bit, but did Lee have to eliminate Avar so thoroughly?

I can hear you saying to yourself now, "What that dame needs is a love story. She should go out and buy a copy of Sloppy Mush and read it." Believe me, that is the lastest and leastess thing this gal would do. Phooey on love pulps, give me good old FA everytime! But please don't get rid of your hero so abruptly next time. All I could think about for an hour afterward was poor Lauren sitting there weeping gallons of the stuff waiting for the trip to Africa with Avar. . . . As you can probably see, I really liked the story a lot, it was just the ending I was sad about. Anyway, more Lee Francis. Keep them rolling . . .

Ava Marie Muse,
1908 Knox Ave.,
St. Louis 10, Mo.

Apologies extended, Ava, and really we're sorry about Avar getting killed. We'll be sure and tell Lee that he missed the boat, and we won't let it happen again. . . . But isn't it almost like life—things have a habit of working out that way when you least expect them to. But you're right, we all want a happy ending...Ed.

SHAVER AND LOVECRAFT

Sirs:

The May issue of FA was a pip! It bubbled with good reading! "Forgotten Worlds" by Lawrence Chandler was wonderfully illustrated and it held my attention all the way.

I agree with Milton Papayianis of Barstow, California, regarding Richard S. Shaver and H. P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft, a close friend of the family for years, loved red roses, sweet chocolate ice-cream, and soft dreamy music. My husband has composed music for years, and H.P.L. loved to watch him at work.

To those of you who love the weird things in life, I'm sure you love weird music too, as much as the late master of the weird did. My hubby often talked with H.P.L. about setting some of his weird poems to music, but unfortunately H.P.L.'s untimely death prevented this.

Muriel E. Eddy,
125 Pearl St.,
Providence 7, R. I.

A very interesting letter, Muriel, and for you readers who are not familiar with H. P. Lovecraft, this great writer of fantastic fiction died in 1937 at the height of his career. Many of his works appear in anthologies today......Ed.

POSITIVELY INDECENT!

Sirs:

I have just finished reading the May issue of FA, and before starting this letter I wish to say that I enjoyed it thoroughly. The stories were fast-moving, and gratifyingly free from obscenity. Which, by the way, is the reason for this letter.

In this issue you printed a letter from Richard Fink, and you asked for readers' opinions of the January cover. Well, I'll be glad to give you that. In the first place, I think that nine out of ten of your covers are indecent. In the second place I think that most of your illustrations are indecent. And to top it off, I consider a dangerously large minority of your stories, especially Richard Shaver's, indecent. Why can't you leave sex out of FA? Admittedly, many yarns would seem dull without a few females, but can't you hit a few happy mediums?

Of course, you will not have nerve enough to print this letter (that's right, I'm daring you) but I'm writing it anyway to get it off my chest.

Just a few more things before I fold my tent. I think the May cover terrific, and I don't think that Shaver should be mentioned in the same breath with Lovecraft.

Paul Lowman, Jr.
218 East Scott Ave.,
Rahway, N. J.

There she be, Paul, right smack in print. And along these lines we'd like to say that we welcome all letters, praising us or panning as the case may be. After all, this is your magazine, and this department especially belongs to you readers, and you have a right to be heard, no matter what your gripe. So don't worry about daring us, we'll print as many letters as we have room for. Which reminds us, the reason we haven't had a Reader's Page in the past few issues is because of the typesetting strike that went on in Chicago for some months. But now that things are back to normal we'll have your favorite department back every month—and the bigger the better!........................Ed.

WE IS BUMS, HUH?

Sirs:

You bums, you! Printing a super story like that made me lose a bet. (It was worth it though.) I was sure that no story could top "Forgotten Worlds" in the May issue. I even went so far as to make a bet on it. Then I feasted my unworthy eyes on "The Black Arrow" in the June issue by your new writer, Jamieson Wood. Orchids and more orchids to Mr. Wood and I hope he'll write another like it.

Second place goes to "The Tides of Time."

Third place I divided between "I Wake Up Dreaming" and "The Ominous Bequest."

Fourth place goes to "Shadow For Sale." Chet Geier must have had a headache when he wrote that.

"Tavern Knight" isn't worth mentioning. Oh, yes, before I forget, I agree with Eva Firestone about "mush" and FA. They don't mix.

Myra "Beanie" Street,
Canyon Heights,
Niles, Cal.

OK, Beanie, we is bums! But seriously, we're glad you liked "The Black Arrow" so well. Keep your eyes peeled for some new stories, however, that will make you bet again!............Ed.

A NEW READER

Sirs:

I have only recently become a reader of your two magazines, FA and AS, but already I am deeply impressed with the high quality of both magazines. I have just finished reading the July FA and enjoyed every word of it. I now offer my judgment of the stories, which were, beyond question, the best of any stf or ftsy magazine I have seen this year.

Richard S. Shaver's "Mirrors of the Queen" was, in my opinion, the equal of your cover story, "Queen of the Panther World." It was, of course, much shorter, but in reading value and interest, I found it to be excellent.

I for one would like to see more Shaver and Livingston in future issues.

"Contract For A Body" and "Air Race" were both excellent stories, and with the other features of FA, I found a magazine hard to beat when I bought the July number. My sincere thanks and appreciation for a fine issue.

Now for a bit of constructive criticism.

Too Many Departments.

Cut down the number of fact features and departments. Give us more story space.

And The Reader's Page.

Only one dinky little page is provided for the very ones who support the magazine! The Reader's Page should have at least four pages.

There should also be a department for the reprinting of stories from past issues.

And as to covers, Ramon Naylor, along with Bergey and Finlay, goes in for semi-draped FEM. They should be drawing for a Naturist Magazine.

Well, that does it for this time. I'll be a reader of FA and AS as long as you print them.

Bob Farnham,
1139 East 44th St.,
Chicago 15, Ill.

Welcome into the fold, Bob.' Your suggestions are interesting, especially the reprint department. This has long been a question: to do or not to do. It seems, however, that most fans prefer new stories, having read the old. How about it, gang?.....................Ed.

UGH!

Sirs:

Me read FA heap long time. Me like FA heap much for many moon. Me now on Page 48 of "Black Arrow." Me heap mad. Me give up. Me quit.

Joe "Him-who-wait-
for-good-story" O'Riley,
1050 Amidon,
Wichita, Kansas.

Ugh, no quit. Smokeum peacepipe.......Ed.

BEYOND HUMAN KEN...

★ By J. R. MARKS ★

ALL over the country today there is an increased interest in native, primitive African art. Numbers of art museums are featuring exhibits of this sort of work, which previously has usually been confined to natural history museums in some dingy dusty section of ethnology labeled contemptuously. "Early Primitive Art." But this is so no longer.

Critical art collectors are beginning to examine examples of native carving from Central Africa with renewed respect. Close examination shows a fidelity to what we like to regard as the "principles of art" that is certainly amazing. The so-called "moderns" have nothing on native African tribes men when it comes to fine artwork.

However, it is less our interest in art than in story that causes this discussion. Many of the art objects brought back from the jungle have a curious history associated with them—sometimes a history that is not only interlaced with pure fascination but also with blood.

In the home of John Lowell Crane, a prominent collector of African art objects stands a small statuette, no larger than a man's fist. The story of its "capture" is a fascinating one—and one which leaves much to be desired in the way of explanations.

Crane personally made many trips to Africa both as a big-game hunter and a collector of *objects d'art*. He discovered the primitive statue of which we were speaking, in the hut of K'rongo, chief of the Kuuiles, a small tribe found in the heart of Tanganyika, British East Africa.

He had camped for the night near the native village with the intention of resuming his safari on the morning, but he accepted the invitation of the chief to visit with him. After the customary formalities and presentation of gifts, Crane happened to look around the torch-lit hut, shrouded in gloom and mystery when his eyes spotted this small statuette. It was a figurine of a native girl, nude, with up-raised arms as in supplication and it was carved from jet-black ebony. This in itself was no recommendation to Crane but what struck his fancy was the fact that the statue had two small stones (later determined to be rhinestones) for eyes and the carving was positively beyond belief in its perfection. This indeed was unusual for ordinarily, Africans seem to prefer to work in symbolic figures rather than realistic.

After a great deal of haggling with K'rongo, Crane found that he could get nowhere. The chief was adamant and refused to sell the figurine. One of Crane's bearers had accompanied

him on the visit and he noticed Crane's fascination. He offered later in the evening when they had returned to their encampment to procure it for Crane for fifty pounds, which naturally would make the boy wealthy by African standards.

CRANE agreed that he should do so. The next morning after the trip was resumed Crane's bearer reported to him. In his hand was the figurine desired so much by Crane. Crane examined it closely. It was a beautiful piece of work. He spoke with a number of his guides all natives, who agreed that it was wonderful, but he noticed that none cared to handle it when he offered it to them for their inspection.

Thinking nothing of the matter then, Crane proceeded with the safari. A short time after they had made camp that night, Crane was visited by a representative of the native bearers who asked to speak with him. Crane naturally agreed thinking that perhaps the boy was going to complain about the food or the pay or something similar. Instead, the native asked Crane to return the statue to K'rongo a day's march back. Crane demanded to know why. The boy explained that the statue was cursed. It represented the spirit of a native girl who had disobeyed her father and tribal chief and had violated other taboos and mores. The girl had died mysteriously and her spirit was forever captured within this block of wood. Crane laughed at the story and told the boy to forget about it. Later on when he made an examination of his camp he found himself alone—all the native bearers had fled. Except one. The boy who had stolen the little statue for him lay face down in the jungle grass. There was no mark of violence whatsoever on him as closely as Crane could determine.

After a long and arduous trip, Crane having abandoned his possessions on the safari with the exception of a rifle, some food and ammunition and the statuette, made his way back to civilization. He told his story to the resident commissioner who promised that if caught, the native boys who had deserted him, would be punished.

Crane forgot about the incident until he arrived back in America, when the statue was stolen from him aboard a transcontinental train. Crane suspected the thief, an elderly student of art because of his interest in the matter when Crane had casually spoken to him. As soon as he felt the loss, Crane reported it to the conductor who promised that he would call the police at the next station. It wasn't necessary.

IT WAS discovered that the man had become trapped in the coupling between two cars while trying to cross from one to the other, and he hung head down between them, his head pulped by the beating from the ties and rails.

Clenched tightly in his right hand was the figurine!

For a while Crane had a feeling that there was something to the story of the curse associated with the statue.

It still sits on a mantel in Crane's home where it is often admired. Lady guests are fond of shivering a little as Crane tells the story. Crane himself is not so sure that there is something to the story. In fact he has remarked a number of times, that he will no longer take it in his hands for fear that it might exert violence of some sort on him. But Crane is growing old and naturally has a tendency to believe the impossible. . . .

The National Museum of Modern Art has attempted to procure the statue from him, saying that it is a bit of perfection, but something keeps Crane fascinated.

This is only one of the many items taken from Africa, and it is certainly more than an odd coincidence that similar stories of curses exist with the other objects too. Any rational scientist must deplore any tendency to believe in anything so ridiculous, but there is always the feeling associated with such stories as with the famous curse of the Egyptian mummy. You'd like to ignore it but. . . .

HUMAN SALAMANDER

★ By JOHN LANE ★

THE ancients firmly believed in the existence of that legendary lizard, the salamander, whose body was immune to fire. Probably this belief stemmed from the earlier legends of the Phoenix, the mythical bird, much like an eagle which could throw itself into flame, be consumed and rise from its own ashes. The old authorities were very firm however in their belief in the salamander claiming to have all sorts of irrefutable proofs of its existence.

Strongly tied up with the legend of the salamander and the Phoenix, was the definite knowledge of the ancient philosophers of the existence of asbestos the magical stone that could not be harmed by fire. It is said that early kings and nobles prized cloths woven of asbestos highly and writers have written of their use as tablecloths which could be cleansed by a bath of flame.

It is noteworthy to consider that man has always been extremely interested in flame and fire—rightly so of course since it is the basic source of energy, but the preoccupation takes on an almost mystic concern. Fire, the Giver of Life, Fire the Giver of Death!

It is no wonder that everyone has evinced a tremendous interest in the modern mystical aspects of fire and its relation to things human.

This interest takes the form of stories and tales and legends of humans who are able to walk on or in fire and even the most logical of scientists have been often embarrassed by their inability to understand much less believe these weird phenomena.

And as so much mysticism does, the stories of fire-walkers come from the East—from Asia, that Motherland of mystery.

It is the fashion to laugh at the Hindu Rope Trick, it is common to sneer at the stories of the Fire-Walkers of the Malay Archipelago—but the sneering and the laughter are unworthy, especially since so many cases are unquestionably documented.

One of the most famous is told by the British explorer and anthropologist, Sir Charles Connaught. Sir Charles was sent by the British Museum to Caudra, a remote, lush and fertile little island among the tens of thousands that dot the South Pacific. He was sent with the intention of investigating the claims of a Dutch planter and trader who had witnessed the ceremonies of the semi-Javanese natives who inhabited the Island. He got more than he bargained for.

Sir Charles, landed on Caudra in June, 1921. He was heartily welcomed by the natives and when he expressed an interest in their fire-walking ceremonies he was cordially invited to witness them.

HE WROTE in his *Journals of an Explorer*: "I was amazed at the accord and felicity with which the Soro (so the natives called themselves) invited me to their religious ceremony. They gathered at night around a long shallow pit, which was about a foot deep. I was placed within clear sight about ten feet away, and I watched closely while natives filled the pit with glowing charcoal. After the glowing charcoal had been allowed to come to a high temperature and I could feel its heat on my face, nonchalantly and at a very slow pace, natives proceeded to dance across it lingering on the ruddy material for as long as five minutes. There was no odor of burnt flesh, nor any sign of injury whatsoever. I was astonished at this strange sight but I was forced to believe my eyes and feelings. Later, I took photographs . . . the ceremony lasted several hours and was repeated for three nights . . . I examined the feet of those who had danced across the glowing coals and could detect no injuries. . . ."

That is Sir Charles' story. Unfortunately the photographs were destroyed but in no way can this lack of photographic evidence detract from his tale because he was considered a reliable and unquestionably accurate observer.

He studied the facts for several weeks and later submitted a monograph to the *Journal of Ethnology*. It was a splendid example of objective reporting. He had taken great pains to assure himself that no possible agents were used

to protect the feet of the natives. He was absolutely positive of this.

He could offer no rational explanation. The facts were there to be interpreted in only one way—those natives walked across glowing charcoal without being burned! How or why is not important. They did it.

If Sir Charles' report was alone the evidence, it might be open to question but hundreds of similar reports have come from everywhere, but particularly India, and they too cannot be doubted.

Orthodox scientists have tried again and again to give explanations ranging from the story that the natives must treat their feet with alum salts, water, or a cushion of air, but these childish trials break down at once, under the most trivial scrutiny.

One hesitates to accept the story of the natives —it was magic—it was a spirit—it was a force—it was a prayer—but regardless, we must believe something. Perhaps someday the correct answer will be found. Until then, we can only imagine.

People who have tried the same thing—walking on fire, without faith—have been severely injured, showing that the phenomenon cannot be a simple matter. Severe burns result in anyone attempting it—anyone, that is, who is not one with the secret—if secret it be.

Fire and flame, heat and warmth, those mysterious agencies of energy, in some way are more than ordinary chemical manifestations. What they are in their relationship to firewalkers—no one knows—but someday, someone will find out. It is unfortunate that in mystic and psychic affairs, the scientific method is not the answer.

QUARTZ—TOUGH STUFF!

★ By KAY BENNETT ★

EVERY DAY laboratories are uncovering new materials for engineering, for textiles, for construction. Synthetics, ersatz materials, substitutes and hundreds of different chemical compounds are available for new tasks. The search for new materials never ends. In spite of this continual discovery, very often old materials are being re-discovered and it is often found that they have hither-to unsuspected uses. Probably the best example of this is glass. Glass is almost as old as man himself, and it would seem as if there was nothing new that could be done with it. Yet we know, to the contrary, that more new things are being done with glass in every phase of human activity, than have ever before been thought of.

And one of the most useful, actually and

potentially, of all the glasses, is plain, simple, fused quartz. Ordinary glass usually consists of sand mixed with compounds of calcium or boron or sodium, which lower the melting point of pure silicon dioxide so that it can be easily cast and blown into the familiar shapes that we know.

But "diluting" silicon dioxide to form these glasses, has the undesirable effect of weakening the very properties of the glass. Fortunately, high temperatures are no longer a problem these days, and the very simplest glass—the best of all glasses—fused quartz—pure silicon dioxide—plain melted sand—is once more being widely used.

Because the coefficient of expansion of quartz is practically zero, it can be heated to white heat, then plunged into ice water—without cracking! No other material, metal or non-metal, has this property! Consequently many sorts of crucibles and containers for chemical and industrial purposes are being made of this wonderful material. Laboratory equipment is now obtainable. Furthermore, quartz is impervious to almost all chemicals except Fluorine and some rare compounds of oxygen.

The physical strength of quartz is astounding It is stronger than steel! This fact, plus its transparency, makes it ideal for many purposes. Wherever vision-ports are desired under high pressures, temperatures and the like, as for example, in steam turbines and gas engines, windows of this substance are provided through which photographs and so on may be taken. When Dr. Beebe's bathysphere was constructed for ocean-depth research, you automatically knew that the only suitable material for windows that would withstand the pressure at the bottom of the sea, was quartz.

Gradually it is coming into use in many fields as its price is brought down through familiarity with working it. We will eventually see it in many household applications.

The physical and chemical laboratories have seen it in use for a long time. It is employed in many scientific instruments where its unique property of returning to its precise shape after being stressed, is of value. Delicate balances are made of thin drawn-out quartz fibers, finer than the finest hair. With such scales, fractions of a millionth of a gram may be measured.

Electrically, quartz is one of the finest of insulating materials. In hundreds of electrical instruments it is used lavishly. Many types of vacuum tubes are constructed with it.

In biology, the fact that it can be made into minute needles, makes it invaluable. It is used as an injection syringe for microorganisms, which are often injected with dyes under a microscope.

Like many other substances, we are only beginning to realize its usefulness. Time will give it more uses.

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When the adding machine was first invented, nobody dreamed that it would grow to be a mental monster that could calculate far better than the human brain! But today such a machine is a reality! What about the mechanical brain of the future? Don't miss the staggering answer in this 50-000-word novel.

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